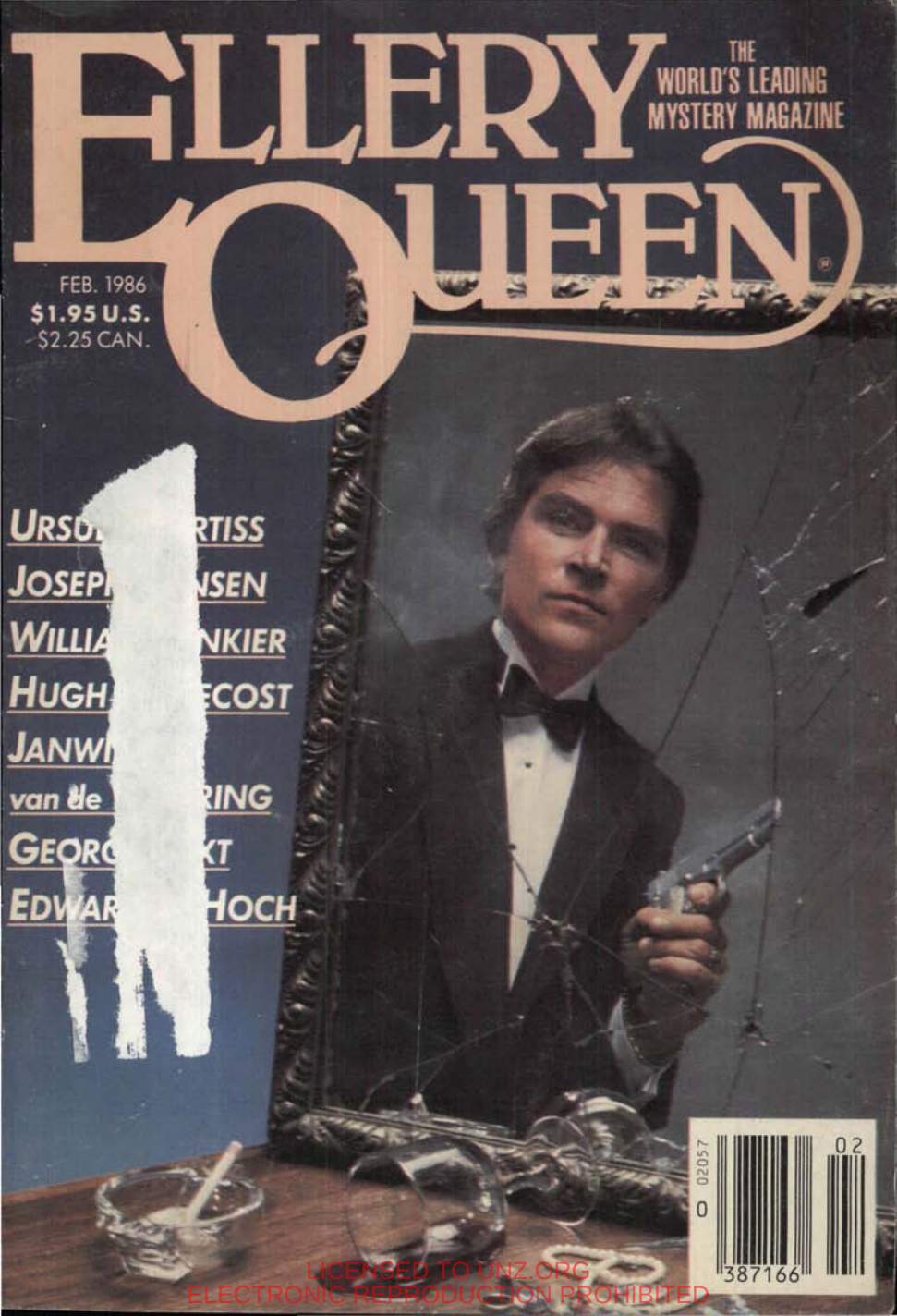
ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEB. 1986
$1.95 U.S.
$2.25 CAN.

URSU RTISS
JOSEP NSEN
WILLIA NKIER
HUGH ECOST
JANWI
van de RING
GEORG KT
EDWAR HOCH



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GET INVOLVED IN THE PERFECT CRIMES

through The Agatha Christie Mystery Collection

Enter into the intriguing world of Agatha Christie, and marvel at the supreme intellect and intuition of her celebrated mysteries. Mysteries constructed like clockwork, with every motive and character carefully interlinked. Mysteries solved by some of the most unforgettable sleuths in the world...

Like the dapper Hercule Poirot, who relies on his "little grey cells" to solve crimes. Miss Jane Marple, whose insights into the people of her own small town help her understand the criminal mind. Plus other fascinating detective characters who are your guides through plot after suspenseful plot.

Exclusive Devonshire Editions

Each volume in The Agatha Christie Mystery Collection is a hardcover Devonshire Edition, crafted in the tradition of fine English bookbinding in Sussex blue leatherette. Each matched volume features padded covers with gold foil titles, Smythe-sewn pages and acid-free papers. Your volumes will become a personal library of stunning distinction.

Now, we invite you to preview a novel each month, without obligation to buy. Simply mail the postpaid card at right to begin your investigation into The Agatha Christie Mystery Collection. You'll find it a most arresting experience!

All Aboard for Murder!

In your first free-preview volume, you are aboard the fabled Orient Express—and murder rides the rails. It is up to Inspector Hercule Poirot to unmask the killer. A most difficult task—since everyone on the train is a prime suspect! Send for MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS now and savor every detail of this superbly-told tale. It is yours to examine and enjoy...

FREE FOR 10 DAYS

Bantam Books, P.O. Box 957, Hicksville, N.Y. 11802

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN®

Our cover model this month is
LARKIN MALLOY
a star of daytime drama
"The Guiding Light"

3 **La Dress** / Ursula Curtiss
23 **Letter Present** / Janwillem van de Wetering
38 **The Creaky Board** / Jeffry Scott
48 **Dark Corridor** / Brendan DuBois
56 **The Problem of the Unfinished Painting** / Edward D. Hoch
75 **Veronica's Husband** / William Bankier
94 **Dream Lover** / George Baxt
104 **Mismatch** / Hugh Pentecost
117 **Me Oriana's Julia** / Jane Bosworth
127 **Snipe Hunt** / Joseph Hansen

72 **The Jury Box** / Allen J. Hubin

Note: indicia on page 159

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A NEW WRITER WHO GOES RIGHT FOR THE JUGULAR."*

BENJAMIN M. SCHUTZ

A NEW LEO HAGGERTY THRILLER

ALL THE OLD BARGAINS

TRADE HARDCOVER $13.95 · ISBN: 0-312-94014-9
SEPTEMBER RELEASE

Already Published:

"A TAUT THRILLER."*

"First person narration keeps the mystery gripping. Schutz, a clinical psychologist displays in his first novel a fine understanding of the psychotic criminal mind."
–Publishers Weekly

EMBRACE THE WOLF

TRADE HARDCOVER $13.95 ISBN: 0-312-94137-4

■ **Get a letter from Leo Haggerty, write dept. LH1**

*OCALA STAR-BANNER (FLA)

Jacket art: Jill Baumann

Jacket art: Jill Baumann

Bluejay Books Inc.
1123 Broadway, Suite 306
New York, NY 10010
Distributed by St. Martin's Press in the U.S.A. and by Methuen Publications in Canada

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a ***NEW*** short story by

URSULA CURTISS

In November 1984, the mystery world lost one of its most graceful and appealing writers. "La Dress" is one of Ursula Curtiss's last short stories, a triumph of a tale that conveys, along with a mounting sense of something going terribly wrong, a wonderful sense of the well ordered life.

This past August, the author's lifelong publisher, Dodd Mead, published The House on Plymouth Street and Other Stories *by Ursula Curtiss, with an Introduction by her sister Mary McMullen, also a well known writer of quality suspense.*

A glimpse of her two young children out on the lawn afforded Nina not the slightest pang. She reflected that, for toning up the muscles and providing a fresh view of life in general, there was nothing like deceiving one's husband . . .

LA DRESS

by URSULA CURTISS

Nina had fallen into a reverie by the time the telephone was answered on the eleventh ring; the kind from which, her thoughts being what they were, it was possible to emerge crying dramatically, "My dress, she is finish, hein?" But a monitor had been on duty, because what came out, crisp and pleasant, was, "This is Mrs. Quayde. My dress was to be ready today, and I'd like to pick it up at—"

"No no no no no," interrupted The Chic Woman. She *might* have been French. She was certainly authoritative, and had probably lifted a metronoming forefinger. "You come Sursday, madame, I have it for you zen."

© *1985 by Ursula Curtiss.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, dear." Compressed into these two words was the fact that this was the second broken delivery date, plus the thwarted realization that it was far too late to snatch back the precious lengths of satin and chiffon, not to speak of the dress from which it was being copied down to the last stitch. Polished black, now in maimed pieces like a pattern—or, considered Nina, giving herself a little chill, the elements of a voodoo ceremony. Might some of her scent still linger there?

She said firmly, "Thursday, then, but I really must rely on that."

Rapid *ouis* followed with the profusion of the nos. Nina put the receiver back, stepped away from the mirror over the telephone table, and, with no one to watch, stretched her arms luxuriously over her head. A glimpse of her two young children out on the lawn afforded her not the slightest pang. She reflected that, for toning up the muscles and providing a fresh view of life in general, there was nothing like deceiving one's husband.

But even if Seth Quayde were to make some sudden unfortunate discovery today, he would not be the proverbial last to know; he would be the first.

Men might turn their heads involuntarily as some spectacular female passed by; women assessed all their own sex without even having to think about it. Malice didn't have to enter in, any more than a column of mercury running up past 98.6 out of pure spite. Ever since early May, Nina had been able to avoid all such scrutiny by pleading the necessity of getting children of six and eight ready for a whole month's absence from home.

This was a subject calculated to bore after the first ten words and, with possible fear of observations to come about the rate at which children grew or the state of their closets unless closely policed, people melted obligingly away. Combined with the services of a reliable babysitter, the temporary exodus left Nina free to pursue her own secret path.

It was Seth who set her on it, saying on an evening in April, "We have an anniversary of note coming up, you know."

The last storm of the season hurled sleet against the windows. The children had gone to bed without demur, entranced at this icy noise after the sun and soft rain which had brought out the daffodils. The sauteed shrimp had been superlative, proving wrong whoever it was who had observed that there was no such thing as a little garlic. Nina, unwilling to break her bubble of contentment even for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something festive, said, "Our tenth. I hadn't forgotten, but there's plenty of time to mull it over."

Seth tipped his dark head back for the last of his brandy. "Remember the year we blew everything at the Plaza?"

Their fifth anniversary, before he had decided to accept the job in Boston. Some gestures fell flat; that one had taken wing.

"You wore a black dress with straps and a straight top—" Seth made unconvincing sketches on his chest "—and a drifty kind of skirt. You had the place by the ears."

"Well, not quite," said Nina, but it was true that the dress had been stunning: bare-armed slipper satin, square-necked, lightly pegged at the narrow waist. A pleat in back released folds of chiffon to float when she walked and fly when she danced.

Seth smiled at her through the lamplight. "Does it still exist?"

"Somewhere, I think." An alarm bell went off in Nina's mind and she held up a hand with complete falsity. "Did I imagine—? No, I didn't. When do you suppose Caroline will stop falling out of bed?"

Her unnecessary trip upstairs got them safely past the subject of the dress—but, thought Nina, presently under the comforter and plastered along Seth's even more comforting length, I could wear it if I had to. I might look a little sausagey, but I could get into it.

In the morning, with the 8:23 bearing Seth off to South Station, she couldn't—not with the fabric bunched one-handedly together above the balking zipper, not even, she could tell, with the help of whatever grim underpinnings she might buy. There was simply more of Nina than there was of the satin.

For all her premonition of the night before, she was aghast at the extent of the failure. How had this happened?

For some time now she had preferred skirts and trousers with elasticized waists—so much more comfortable, she had said airily to herself—and the kind of shirt designed to be worn casually outside instead of having to be tucked back in when she stretched into the car for groceries or reached up to the spice cabinet in search of the celery seed which moved around by itself. On the other hand, she hadn't taken to nipping at chocolates; she hadn't been a dessert eater since she was sixteen; potatoes had gone largely out of her life with her first pregnancy.

Was it then—black dress which had once enclosed her so slenderly whipped back into the closet and well out of sight—the slow, remorseless buildup of all the testing bites and sips taken from what-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ever she was preparing for the children? The buttered half-roll left by pin-thin Elizabeth, the spoonful of Fordhook lima beans that wouldn't fit on their plates?

With a sinking heart, Nina next examined the area of physical exercise. She coped with the house and the children on a daily basis, and until the advent of school that had involved considerable mileage, but Mrs. Peavey came once a week to vacuum, change all the beds, scrub the two baths, mop and wax the kitchen floor. The beach was only a twenty-minute drive away, but very little real swimming got done as Nina and Seth had to take it in turns to stay in shallow water with Caroline, who unlike Elizabeth at her age had not yet learned to swim. Caroline, thought Nina rancorously, was content to fall out of bed with frequency, waking everybody with her electrified shrieks.

How long was it until their anniversary? Forty-seven days. Even though she could scarcely fast like a jockey or train like a boxer, it could be done—it had to be done because of Seth's gentle, half amused needling. He wouldn't see her in the black dress again, because at some unheeded moment a lighted cigarette had made contact with the right hip, but he would certainly see her in one exactly like it.

If, said Nina to herself, it kills me.

First, the no-nonsense book about which she had heard a good deal without paying any real attention. It was based on the premise that a daily half hour of selected exercises, a preponderance of them done on the floor, broke down fat for readier utilization by the body provided that the body did not reward itself with a little feast of calories afterward.

Nina had not realized how difficult it would be to isolate an absolutely private half hour for herself without some agitation between or joint proposal from Caroline and Elizabeth, with a claiming and breathless "Mom!" finding her wherever she might be. And secrecy was of the essence: she wanted no good-humored encouragement from Seth, or surreptitious measurings. It was unthinkable that she should not reach her goal, but even more unthinkable that he would be nice about it. A little rueful, but nice, and in time—he wouldn't be able to help it—entertained.

Neither had she been thoroughly aware of how closely the miniature poodle followed her around, informing her with an absolutely stilled regard of his wish for sustenance or water or a sojourn outside;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the rest of the time a small black curl beside her chair. Like all dogs, he would regard a supine adult as being either in the throes of a fit or anxious for games and Nina had to take him through a thorough catechism of his wants before she shut herself in her bedroom and spread out her towel.

As to the diet, there was nothing she could do about the breakfast which for years had consisted of tomato juice and coffee, but she had her second midmorning cup black. Contriving lunches of well under two hundred calories became a kind of grisly sport. Of them all, including mushrooms sliced and cooked in a double boiler with a tablespoon of white wine and spread on a thin slice of unbuttered toast, her favorite was a hard-boiled egg crumbled over what felt like a bale of well lemoned lettuce and accompanied by a profligate three slices of tomato. This took an eternity to eat and provided insight as to why horses in fields had such a musing air.

In the first two weeks, Nina lost four pounds but then came face to face with the hard reality that if this rate were to be maintained a further effort was required. Sorrowful but single-minded, urging Seth into a shower after the train home, she assumed the preparation of what were their ritual predinner drinks in summer. Seth had gin and tonic, she had water with a slice of lemon and a convincing splash of diet gingerale.

By the end of the fourth week, with a second half hour of the rolling, flexing exercises tacked on in the afternoon as often as she could manage, Nina had to do some discreet safetypinning of her skirts. The intriguing depressions under her cheekbones were back. Seth said concernedly, "You aren't coming down with something, are you?" and she said it was the heat and took to applying the faintest color.

She tried on the black dress, and went into Boston in search of fabric.

Not black for the otherwise-duplicate. At thirty-four, her skin was still taut and silky, but she had never had a model's careful immobility of mouth and eyebrows and the years of head-back laughter and worry over 104-degree temperatures in the night and wonderment feigned for the children had left tiny, light fans and brackets to which black would call cruel attention.

Nor white, either, in spite of the unflawed darkness of her hair. Her skin was too fair to acquire more than an eggshell bisque in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sunniest of summers and there would be all those golden-shouldered women around.

Lilac was cool and pretty but turned sepulchral under artificial lighting. Green was for crisp occasions. What she finally found, and felt had been waiting in her horoscope all along, was an absolute summation of rose—not a failed red but a concentrated, iced-over discipline of its own.

Next, she found The Chic Woman.

In appearance, The Chic Woman, so identified by an elegant little cream-on-black sign, did not live up to her name. Tracked down by word of mouth to a small blue-shuttered house heavily shadowed by maples, with nothing more informative than a number on the mailbox, she proved to be of indeterminate age, on the desiccated side, and with hair of a suspicious pitchiness. She introduced herself simply as "Sada," much as Elizabeth of England would not have had to follow up with "Windsor."

Strictly speaking, she should not have been operating a business in her residentially zoned part of Shipwood, named for its great but now largely vanished oaks. Rumors of her talent had spread, however, and as long as there was no unseemly confluence of cars everybody looked the other way.

"Evelyn Rue swears by her," Peggy Rolfe had said, asked about a seamstress. "You know that heavenly cape she brought back from Edinburgh that her nephew spilled acid on from his chemistry set? Talk about reweaving—you'd never know a thing had happened to it."

And, "My sister designed her own wedding dress, but The Chic Woman wouldn't have any part of it and changed it all around," said Jane Norman, slavish. "Princess Diana would have wept with envy."

The Chic Woman, attired in unremarkable slacks and tunic of strong yellow, came alive with appreciation of the satin's body, the chiffon's airy flow. When she had listened to Nina's capsuled explanation of the need for a precise replica at a given date, she handed over the black dress she had been examining, said, "We will see," and indicated a curtain at the end of the kitchen which, with its desk and table piled with pattern books, was part office.

The zipper slid up with ease. The bodice was of such a closeness that it would be unwise if not disastrous to sneeze, but Nina had time in hand. She emerged to find The Chic Woman smoking a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cigar—and looking amused at Nina's dismayed speculation as to whether, after all this, she would go out for the anniversary evening smelling like a group of politicians who had taken all night to arrive at a candidate. "Voila," she said, and opened a door.

Here was the workroom proper, with its long table and sewing machine and scraps and tailings of fabric lit baldly from overhead. At not much after nine o'clock, air stirred coolly in to touch the folded satin and chiffon and a bar holding garments in various stages of completion.

As briskly as a nurse, The Chic Woman whipped around Nina with a tape measure, entered the information on a file card, and after consultation with her calendar could have the dress basted four days hence; a single fitting then would suffice. Nina went home and, curved in an arc on the toweled floor, did fifty leg-lifts, a simultaneously raised arm so maneuvered that there was a pull at her midriff.

"I sink pearls only," said the seamstress on the rainy afternoon when Nina stood in the satin that glimmered like a lamp. She was as proprietorial as if it were she who had found the fabric in which to copy her own original creation. "Or—"

She reached behind her for a deep square of leftover chiffon, which she flipped into a triangle and knotted loosely just below the tips of Nina's shoulders. "No." Her swift removal was like the recoil of a hand which had just struck a wrong note in an otherwise smooth ripple from a piano. "One line, so."

From somewhere in the inner regions of the house there was a small woody sound, as of a table bumped or a chair pushed aside. The Chic Woman produced a cigar from her tunic pocket, lit it, consulted her heavily annotated appointment book, and fell into a brisk discussion of dates.

She doesn't smoke those things by choice, thought Nina, driving away in a state of mild diversion. There's a man in there nobody's supposed to know about and she's afraid he might light a cigar at any minute.

It was none of her concern, and therefore unfair to remember when she called on the Saturday agreed upon and was told that the dress wasn't ready.

"I have work only for you," said The Chic Woman in a tone of rebuke, "and now I have band uniforms to alter." She managed to hold the term at arm's length, like some dreadful offering from a cat. "Tuesday . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But today was Tuesday, and the date had just been moved to Thursday. It hadn't crossed Nina's mind even fleetingly to say, "If you'll tell me how much I owe you I'll pick up the dress right away and have someone else finish it." The Chic Woman was not a personality to trifle with, and besides, where would Nina take the dress? To the Shipwood Tailors, adjoining the Shipwood Cleaners, who had absentmindedly made her Burberry a full inch too short so that a faint false hemline had lingered for months? What might they do if they got their hands on slipper satin?

It did occur to her, however, that for purposes of protestation it was a help to know the formal means of address. A familiar "Sada," never used, wouldn't do. Peggy Rolfe thought the last name was "LeClerc," but Jane Norman was almost sure of something like "Shastovsky."

On impulse, Nina telephoned Evelyn Rue of the fabled Edinburgh cape.

Evelyn didn't know, but said promptly, "Who cares? She's awfully good, and for what she does she isn't expensive."

"Is there a man in her life?"

"Isn't there in everybody's?" asked Evelyn with genuine curiosity.

"A problem, I meant. On the scene."

"Well, she did mention a brother, and I thought she sounded a little afraid of him, but you know those hot-blooded people. You think they're going to kill each other and it turns out they're only having fun." It had become noon and a small clink of ice cubes traveled along the wire. "Did I ever tell you that I got dressed in her kitchen one night?"

Nina said no.

"Fact. She'd made me an evening gown for that thing the Coxes gave at the Copley for the Kennedys, and it got so late there wouldn't be time for me to go and get it and then come back here, and she had to meet somebody at the airport, so—" There was a sharp sound of shattering glass. "Oops, dropped my cigarette," said Evelyn unconcernedly. "So she told me where the back-door key was and left the light on and over I went like a thief in the night—this was February, mind you—and made the change there. I must say I felt a little weird standing in a strange house in just my slip."

Nina turned her back on the mirror for total concentration. "Did you get the impression that there was someone there?"

"How could there have been? The whole place was dark except for the kitchen," said Evelyn—who had done the pioneering and passed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other people along to The Chic Woman. Her voice took on a further testiness. "If you discover that she's a way station for illegal aliens or some such thing, now that I've found someone who knows how to fit what we politely call my hollow back, just don't tell me about it, will you?"

On Thursday, the dress needed pressing but the seamstress was sure she could get to it the next day. "I'll tell you what," said Nina with a lightness woven of steel. "I have to be away tomorrow so I'll come by latish on Saturday, bringing a check with me, and camp on your doorstep. How much . . .?"

On Friday afternoon, she and Seth drove the children up to her parents' for their ritual month in Boothbay Harbor, Maine. Nina wore the most unwrinklable garment she owned, a concealing polyester suit closely printed in lilac and fawn and cream. It did not deceive Mrs. Keogh's eye. She said at once, "Nina! You've—" and Nina shot her a glance which had the communication of a rapier. "When did you paint the kitchen floor? It looks beautiful."

Later and in privacy, she told her mother about her marathon effort and surprised herself with her own definition: "It's a sort of anniversary present for Seth, so I don't want to unwrap it just yet. Actually, it's a present for us both."

Her mother gave her a keen glance, smiled privately, and said, "I'm sure you've had the sense to take vitamins."

The cottage was small: galley-sized kitchen with bath opening off, living room with wood-burning stove flanked on one side by the Keoghs' bedroom and on the other a steep stairway leading to the room Nina and Seth occupied, slant-ceilinged, with cold air even at this time of year carrying in the scent of pines. With the advent of the grandchildren, the Keoghs had had a sleeping-porch built on, and here, although they would have done considerable carping over cots at home, Elizabeth and Caroline stretched out in communion with the dark, waiting until the last deliciously chilly moment before they bent forward and pulled the folded wool blankets nestlingly up to their chins.

The Quaydes slept late in the change of air, and by the time they were ready to leave, the children being dragged in to say goodbye although they had long since made mental farewells to their parents, it was close to eleven o'clock. A formless apprehension—or perhaps only hunger, as her lunch consisted of six steamed clams with ap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

proximately twelve drops of cocktail sauce—began to creep over Nina when they were halfway home.

Pinned down, the apprehension had to do with Jane Norman's sister's wedding dress, so sweepingly revised by The Chic Woman. What if all these delays were in aid of arbitrary fiddling with Nina's dress? Suppose she had said to herself, puffing meditatively on her cigar for the benefit of another client, that a back pleat should be balanced by a front pleat?

They were home by five. Nina opened windows in what felt like echoing emptiness and Seth announced his intention of a beer, a bath, and a nap, in that order. It was from the kitchen that, evidently from a note by the babysitter who had come to feed and let out the poodle, he called with mild curiosity, "Who's Sada?"

Had the surprise element been thrown to the winds? "A friend of Evelyn Rue's," said Nina, jolted into the doorway. "She called, I take it?"

Seth nodded, pouring beer into a tall glass. Unlike many men when acutely thirsty, he appreciated the very look of it, the frosty beading and clear runnels on the outside. "But no message."

"Oh. Well, she's a talker, so while I'm on my feet and in my clothes I think I'll go and get us some horseradish for the roast beef, and I might stop for gas. Have a nice bath."

Seth glanced out at the lawn and trees turned a fuming acid green by a deepening purplish light: August's habitual thunderstorms were going to make an early appearance this year. "Better take a raincoat."

Indeed yes, if only to wrap the dress without which Nina was determined not to leave the small house under the maples. The check was folded into a zippered compartment of her handbag. She said, "I'll tiptoe when I get back so as not to wake you," and got into the car and drove to The Chic Woman's.

The babysitter had brought in last night's newspaper, but tonight's still reposed in the Quaydes' driveway. In it, on page 5, was a brief account which would not have interested them.

The body of a stabbing victim in the parking lot of a local lounge had been identified as that of Arthur Carlisle, also known as Marco Fellini and Elsinore Pugh and wanted by authorities in New York and Connecticut for drug activity. Witnesses engaged in a separate fight in the parking lot described his assailant as a heavy-set blond male. Police were seeking a woman who had reportedly fled from the scene.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anyone genuinely enthralled by this not very singular small-hours incident would have had a few exasperated questions to ask. What did the woman look like? Had she fled in a car or on foot? Had she been the companion of victim or attacker or neither?

But whatever this particular newspaper lacked in coverage it made up for by a certain scrupulousness. Bodies were never found "lying" anywhere—posthumous prevarication, did the copy editors think?—but always, and with some unction, "laying."

For all the fitful knottings among Nina's ribs as she pulled in deep under maples and followed the brick path to the discreet back door—the garage was closed, for one thing—The Chic Woman answered her knock at once. Although, today, she might have been The Antique Woman. Whatever cosmetic marvels she employed to keep her age at "indeterminate" had been neglected, so that her face was pallid and queerly sunken, her eyes small and bald, her inky hair defiant and pitiable.

"Madame Quayde." The seamstress had obviously begun and then aborted a telephone call at the door summons; she crossed to her desk and replaced the receiver. "Now at last we have ze try-on, eh?"

"If you think it's necessary." Peculiarly embarrassed, Nina placed her check on the table that held the pattern books and anchored it with the ashtray there. The Chic Woman, paying no attention, shot back the curtain on the improvised changing room and pointed like a conjurer.

On its hanger, pressed, the dress looked less sewn than sculpted, as if everything but the most beautiful simplicity had been chiseled away. With the bare kitchen light making shadows and shimmers, it was a combination of glow and ice. Nina, stepping out of her suit, made a vow about those extra pounds: Never again. It needn't mean a tunnel-vision existence. A trap once fallen into and laboriously climbed out of could be avoided in future by instinct and a twice-weekly check with the scale.

The pearls she had worn under her suit collar now shone softly against her bare skin. Warm, or cool? When she emerged, The Chic Woman, who had activated a floor fan while she waited, gazed, made a slow inspecting circle, and clapped her hands once. The gesture might have come from a symphony conductor or a ballet mistress.

There could be no doubt that, band uniforms apart, she took her work with the utmost seriousness. Uneven patches of color appeared on her greyish cheeks as she said, "So," and adjusted a shoulder

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strap minutely. "Turn, please." And, when Nina obeyed with an inquiring glance back, smote herself on the forehead. "Ze hook and eye."

Not essential with a zipper that locked, urged Nina, realizing that by now she ought to be home with the horseradish they didn't need. Besides, hooks and eyes always fell apart.

"Not mine," said the seamstress grimly, picking up a spool of rose thread—and without warning there was a thunderous knock at the door.

It was the kind of sound which demanded rather than sought entry, and there was unconcealed temper behind it. Nina jerked involuntarily, heart responding as if to a gunshot, and wheeled in fright as a second heavy-fisted bang was followed by an incomprehensible shout. The Chic Woman put an imperative finger to her lips, as if Nina would have dreamed of betraying any presence here, and ran in soft silent slippers to push away folds from the driveway side of the kitchen.

She was back at once, grip painful on Nina's arm as she led the way with force to a door opening on the inner part of the house. Behind them, wood shuddered under what was identifiably a kick.

"I am coming!" shouted The Chic Woman, and in a small dim dining room lowered her voice to a furious whisper. "Go at once, madame, it is the only way. My brother is drunk and has the driveway blocked." Instead of being heightened by stress, her accent and phrasing were falling away from her. "When he's like this he hates all that—" a motion of her head indicated the workroom and the toil over clothes to be worn by other people "—and I can only handle him alone."

"But my bag—" Nina had no thought of her wallet or even her car keys, it was simply like leaving one of her hands behind.

"I'll get it to you in an hour or so. For God's sake, run! But look out first and make sure there are no—"

Drunken cohorts, to watch this means of exit? Half propelled into the living room by an ungentle push, Nina got the front door open, took in the emptiness of the road, was outside under the maples that seemed to have swept in and compounded their own special darkness in the threatening late-afternoon light. She began to run, but not because of what she had been told. A cold and terrible clarity was unfolding itself around her, and although it made no sense to the brain, it did to the blood.

This riveting dress, withheld from her almost as a caprice. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remarkable aging of the seamstress, similar to that of an actress playing her own mother in a movie scene, and her excited color when Nina had emerged from behind the curtain. The telephone receiver lying on the desk, returned to its cradle after The Chic Woman's "Madame Quayde." The muffling, whirring floor fan.

And the battering at the door. A tableau, staged to flush Nina out into the open along a road where all the other inhabitants seemed to be on vacation or engaged in occupations which required working on Saturday or tied up in broom closets—

But here, behind her, came a black car of imposing length, its driver slowing for an understandably curious look at a young woman pelting along in satin and high heels, with no handbag. When he brought the car to a halt and opened the passenger door, Nina walked a few steps in order to regather her breath. He might be another actor in the tableau or he might be someone she had seen occasionally in the town or on the station platform. It was hard to be sure either way about the second possibility. He was blond, fiftyish, settled-looking, of a construction which made his lack of a seatbelt understandable, although he would have been called more heavy-set than fat. He said like a man wary of being accused of attempting a pickup, "I beg your pardon, but are you in any kind of trouble?"

Seth had run his bath, for purposes of soaking out the stiffness from the long drive, when he put his shoes back on, rebuttoned his shirt, and went downstairs in pursuit of a niggling half memory.

And yes, there it was, half toppling when he had reached into the second shelf of the refrigerator for his beer: horseradish. Granted cold roast beef for dinner, the two of them couldn't consume three-quarters of a bottle.

Seth was not an experienced cataloguer of refrigerator contents—he could seldom find his Liedercranz without help—but with two children and occasionally their visiting friends, Nina had learned to be out of self-defense. Thus, instead of being summoned constantly to the scene, she could call wanted information from the living room, the top of the stairs, the garden.

With this particular dinner planned for tonight, she would have known about its necessary condiment. The horseradish had been an excuse to get out of the house and call—or go see—the unknown Sada.

It had to be faced that there had been something different about Nina for the past few weeks, and not only the deep curve above her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hip Seth had traced with an infinitely cautious finger one night after she was asleep. That was fine, and he had managed to pry a few words out of Mrs. Keogh the night before to reassure him that it was nothing to do with an illness being kept from him, but there was a certain—secrecy, a new air of looking beyond him and the children to something more exciting.

Seth plucked the babysitter's note out of the kitchen wastebasket, but it was no more informative than it had been at first glance. Sada. Thoroughly at odds with everything he had learned about Nina in ten years of marriage, the name suggested a fortune-teller, or, worse, a swami.

High on Seth's list of things to avoid, although well below nuclear war or health disasters, were swamis. He saw them as seductively brown-skinned men with silver-streaked beards and turbans with stars, murmuring to women in close-curtained rooms that the beauty of their souls could not attain full perfection while they were bound by their shallow, tawdry mates. From "esteemed lady" they would slink swiftly to "dear lady," and after that it was anybody's guess.

But not Nina, never Nina, thought Seth, and all the time he was looking up and dialing Evelyn Rue's number.

He liked Evelyn—forty-fivish, the seasoned and seasoning wife of a well connected Boston estate lawyer. In another era it might have been hard to pry her loose from a table where the port had begun to circulate. On the other hand, she could be counted on never to make public withdrawals from a private bank no matter how late the hour or who the just-departed guests or where the talk had strayed.

But Nina had produced her name with a flurried air, and now Seth said, "Evelyn? Seth Quayde. Sorry to bother you, but Nina isn't home and there's a message about Sada. Who's that and where, in case this storm breaks loose?"

"A seamstress," said Evelyn promptly, sending a wave of reassurance over the wire. "I don't have her last name, but she's at forty-three Speedwell Road, a white house with blue shutters and a lot of maples." There was a very short pause. "How long has Nina been gone, do you know?"

He had swallowed half his beer, walked out to the driveway's end to collect the mail and the furled newspaper, glanced at a few letters, carried the remainder of the beer upstairs, run the bath. "Twenty-five minutes, half an hour."

Now he would be admonished about the length of time it took to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pin up a hem—but Evelyn said soberly, "I'm probably crazy, but if I were you I'd go get her."

Seth was in the car, seemingly without transition, before the wording of that struck him. Go get her—as if Nina were suddenly a child, helpless without adult transport, or a parcel stacked in a—

Speedwell Road wasn't on any of his familiar routes, but its location and even its general appearance—countryish, almost on the outskirts of the town—flashed into his head without difficulty. At every stop, and sometimes they were rolling stops, he looked both ways for Nina's old but still gallant white Thunderbird convertible in case she had decided on a circuitous route home.

Unlike swamis, he reminded himself as a long black car sped through its right of way at one of these stops, seamstresses were helpful, innocuous women, poring through fashion magazines for new neckline treatments or possibly gussets, straining their eyes over tiny stitches. They kept their long shears sharp, no doubt, but that was for zipping through fabric.

And this particular seamstress wasn't home. Lamps would be required by now under the heavy cloak of maples, but there were none—the driveway was empty. Seth's knocking at the front door was answered by silence. Because Evelyn Rue had said what she had, he followed the brick path around to the back and looked at unlighted windows there, too. He even peered absurdly through the window of the locked garage, but the car in dimness was either grey or blue.

Simple, then. He had somehow missed Nina, although from a bird's-eye view the route home would be an unevenly shaped lollipop with a long curving stem. There were the narrow side roads he had glanced along, but it was the longer half of the rough circle which would take her to an area of gas stations and she had said she might stop.

As for Sada—Seth tried that in his mind and it still sounded strange—she had finished work for the day and locked up and gone off with a companion. It was the sensible explanation. So why wasn't he feeling relieved and lighthearted and anxious to get home to Nina, who would be baffled at having found their own house unlocked and empty?

That was even simpler. At the near end of Speedwell Road, and there all the time because there hadn't been a sound on the air that waited for thunder, were three leather-jacketed boys lounging against their motorcycles.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was an ugly sensation in Seth's chest. He got into the car and drove down to them, watched steadily from under the hickory tree which, together with their immobility and their dark clothing, had rendered them invisible.

Two of them were black; the third, who had what appeared to be a chain wound casually around his right hand, Mexican or Puerto Rican. They all looked like menace ready for action. Or was the action past, were they standing around like arsonists watching a building burn?

Seth had the spokesman picked out before his wheels had stopped turning—the biggest of the three, with a down-curving mustache and the build of a middleweight boxer—and, engine running, addressed himself to that pair of eyes. Had the boys been there long?

He was calm about it, almost offhand. He got three timed shrugs, the other two taking their cue.

"I was supposed to meet my wife at that house back there. She's driving a white Thunderbird, a convertible. Did you happen to see it?"

By some sliding-sideways consultation, the second black was allowed this response. "Headed out of town, fast, eight–ten minutes ago."

Seth didn't believe it. This was mockery, the fillip to a little sport on a hot Saturday with electricity collecting in the atmosphere. It was true that there was no sign of Nina's car, but if they had blocked and then hemmed her in at this corner they could have forced her to get out and surrender the keys.

And then what? *Then what?*

The boxer said with great seriousness, "What your wife like, man?" and the Mexican boy guffawed and was turned on with such ferocity that he cringed. Evidently there was only one joker in this *little pack*.

Seth opened his door with deliberation and stepped out onto the shoulder, knowing it to be an unwise move but unable to tolerate the car's shrinking interior. The hickory tree rattled suddenly with rain like a leaky umbrella. Were the leaves moving or had there been a stir in the group?

He said evenly between his teeth, "My wife is on the tall side and has dark hair. She was wearing either a raincoat or—" There was a nightmare second of blankness before he could remember Nina's suit and give an approximate description, and somewhere in there he lost them. Although they didn't move, it was as palpable as if

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they had yawned and turned away. But at first there had been growing absorption under the tree, and a conviction that, unlikely though it seemed, he was passing a test.

The rain increased and the sky to the north burst briefly into light. Seth said desperately over the following thunder, "She'd been at her dressmaker's, she may have changed her clothes, but she had on a string of pearls—"

The last four words did it. The spokesman held up a peremptory palm, said prosaically, "We all gonna get struck by lightning we stand here," and told him.

As sifted out of street talk and motorcycle slang, they had been cruising along the road that ran perpendicular to this one when across the fields they had seen a man, "a big yellow-haired bastard," catch up with a running woman in a party dress and give her a cuff that knocked her to the ground. His intention seemed to be to get her into a big black car, but when she broke away he backed her up against a fence and started slapping her. As a husband-and-wife dispute, it had an air of getting out of hand. Accordingly, the three had let out a concerted whoop of warning and revved up to and around the corner, Rudy winding up his chain in preparation, by which time the man had flung the woman against the fence, leaped into his car, and taken off. The two blacks had given fruitless chase, hoping for the plate number, leaving the still chain-decorated Rudy to see if the woman, who had managed to crawl under the barbed wire and into the field with its deep grass, was all right.

She hadn't answered to his calls and then the others', but they figured she had been spooked into hiding—"Hell, you spooked *me,*" said Seth, tight around the chest—and then they had regrouped themselves under the tree, hoping that the man would come back and try to finish what he had started.

Waiting there in their sinister jackets and boots and baleful patience to take on a big yellow-haired bastard who had been beating up a woman they had never seen before. A simple desire for action, or something more?

Seth approached the fence, shouting Nina's name. The horse and goat whose territory this was raised their grazing heads curiously, but that was all. He shouted again, and something else came lifting out of the grass: a familiar dark head, soaked, and a pair of bare, narrow-strapped shoulders.

"You gonna cut your clothes," said the leader chidingly, and from some recess of his jacket produced a wire-cutters.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The bottom of three strands of barbed wire flew free. Seth turned just before he ducked under and held out his hand. "Seth Quayde, Eveningside Drive, come and see us," but he knew they never would even as the motorcycles roared away. This was a one-time encounter, in every respect.

Nina was rockily on her feet when he reached her, surrealist in sopping satin which touched off an echo, surrounded by grass and battered Queen Anne's Lace and a now skittish horse and goat. Her face was beginning to swell. They talked against each other, Seth into her wet hair and she against his chest in a voice suggesting difficulty with her jaw.

"He didn't really see *me,* he saw this—" Despairing sweep of her hand down her side. "And when he did see me he said, 'You were never at Sid's Lounge, were you?' and I said no. And then those terrible kids—"

It was not the time to ask about Sid's Lounge or tell her what the terrible kids had accomplished. "We'll get you to a doctor—"

"No. Get me home. Get me out of this dress—" Nina shivered violently. "His *look.* I think he went to kill her, Seth."

And so he had. Rage at being tricked, and certainty that she was the real witness.

According to the indicator, Nina's gas supply would have carried her home and back to a gas station the next morning. In actuality, the tank had run dry before the panicky Chic Woman could reach the nearest bus depot.

If what she had engineered did happen, the Thunderbird had to be well away from her premises with Nina's handbag and raincoat and suit tidily inside. If something went wrong, it was even more vital to put distance between herself and the blond man, the killer seen in the lounge's parking lot while she in the rose dress had only been glimpsed from the tail of an eye and to whom she had carefully presented herself as far too old for such goings-on in the small hours. Including flight.

Destination furiously guessed at, because Shipwood was far too small a town to hide in, she was found the next morning in a woods twenty yards from the undamaged Thunderbird pushed into a rutted lane, her neck snapped.

There would come a time when, more facts at her disposal al-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

though some blanks had to be guessed at, Nina could put all this in the form of an anecdote when an anecdote seemed appropriate.

"I had a seamstress—her name was Clara Tompkins although she called herself Sada and her sign said The Chic Woman—who wore a dress she was making for me and witnessed a murder in it. The victim was a cocaine dealer she'd been harboring in payment for some old debt, apparently, because she didn't report the stabbing.

"She'd driven to the lounge where he was killed, whether to see why he walked there every two weeks or just to show off the dress, nobody knows. She didn't dare get back into her car, because by that time the killer had caught sight of her, so she went home on foot and incidentally got grass or bark stains on the dress because she had it cleaned the next day. He must have gotten the registration from the Motor Vehicles Bureau, but when he turned up, ostensibly to see if she could help him in the matter of his 'friend's' murder, she was ready for him, looking seventy and saying that her brother had borrowed her car that night.

"And to clinch things, she gave him me.

"Oh, yes, they caught him. I'd had a very close-up look, which I don't think I'll go into, at a tiny growth on his lower left eyelid and a little-finger ring, silver, which could only have come off with a hacksaw, and a line of gold along the edge of an eyetooth. He couldn't have had any of those fixed without attention once they were circulated in the newspapers."

Allowing time for bruises to subside, the Quaydes celebrated their anniversary two weeks late—not in Boston at the theater and the Ritz but at an old inn twenty miles to the north which had a few bedrooms looking out over gardens and a croquet course. Nina wore pleated silk, pale primrose, with narrow gold kid at the waist; she would never wear rose or slipper satin again.

It was the only leftover of the afternoon when she had been looking death in the eye. Seth had provided the catharsis on a night when she had come trembling out of a nightmare in which clothes she recognized were being worn by sly-faced strangers. Jane Norman's sister's wedding dress was there, somehow recognizable although Nina had never even met Jane Norman's sister, with fresh blood gleaming on the breast.

"It could be done all the time," she said half incoherently to Seth. "How would you know where a dress had been before you even wore it?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

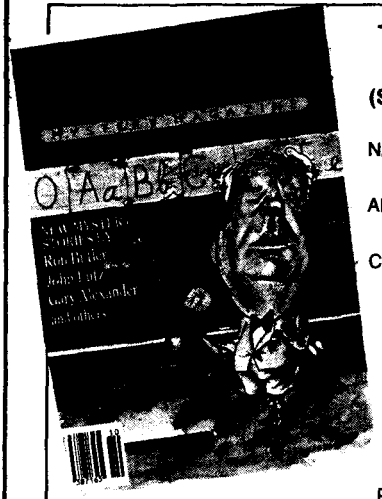
He pressed her head closer on his shoulder, soothing hand on her hair. "Nina. That would be like assuming that nurses write down any old blood-pressure figures if they don't like you, or readers in publishing houses pass along good ideas from rejected manuscripts to blocked writers, or dentists make six other little holes while they're fixing the one you went in for."

For a few seconds, until his eyes snapped wide in the darkness, he was actually pleased with himself. They they both broke into helpless, simultaneous laughter, from which Nina finally recovered sufficiently to sit up and switch on her bedside light.

"There's half a bottle of champagne on the ice," she said, "and I'd say right now was the time for it, wouldn't you?"

"Q"

A special offer for mystery fans...



12 Issues of Alfred Hitchcock for only $15.97

(Save 24% off the regular newsstand price)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE ____ ZIP _____

Mail to:
ALFRED HITCHCOCK
P.O. Box 1932
Marion, OH 43305

☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Bill me

For Immediate Subscription Service Call
TOLL FREE 1-800-247-2160 (in IOWA 1-800-362-2860).

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for your first issue.

Outside US and Poss. $19.97 (cash with order US funds). DQB6H

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Grijpstra-de Gier story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

This new story from Janwillem van de Wetering about de Gier and Grijpstra is not a police procedural in the manner of most of his stories about this attractive pair. It is, rather, a confession of a most colorful kind by a homicide suspect who has been gently interrogated by them. The tenth novel in this series, The Rattle-Rat, *was published in November by Pantheon Books . . .*

LETTER PRESENT

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

I just had a look at the visiting card again, after finding it in my file. It was neatly glued to a sheet of clean paper and put away under the letter G. Evidently I knew I would need it sometime. The tiny document is filed under G because the person it refers to is called Grijpstra, Hank Grijpstra, adjutant of the Municipal Police, Murder Squad.

The adjutant, a paternal type with short grey hair that sticks up like the bristles of a well worn brush, came to see me to inquire, as he put it, about my father's "untimely demise." That's the way the old bird of prey likes to express himself. I would choose my words differently, but then I'm a bit of a scholar in my off-time and a publisher of literature by trade.

"Sorry to disturb," Adjutant Grijpstra said kindly after he lowered his bulk into the easy chair we reserve for visitors. For a moment, as a respected citizen in our free country, I felt relieved. That the police was visiting me, the adjutant explained, was due to a regrettable fact, Dad's possibly unnatural death. The authorities protect the citizen in a true democracy. The adjutant pointed out that I, as the bereaved party (isn't it terrible when a son loses his beloved

© 1985 by Janwillem van de Wetering.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

father?), could be sure of receiving help. Isn't the State a father, too? I could rest assured.

I felt immediately threatened again, though not so much by the well mannered adjutant but by his companion, a silent detective-sergeant, who had also given me his card. The sergeant's card found a place in the wastepaper basket after they left. One hint of conscience was sufficient in my case. The sergeant's name was Rinus de Gier.

Gier means "vulture" and both officers reminded me of deadly powerful birds. There I was, stretched out on the glowing white sand of a helpless desert, and there they perched, flapping their transparent batlike wings on the branch of a dead tree. Just another few seconds *and the vorpal blades go snickersnack.* I read too much and always remember the wrong passages, passages that frighten me and grow in horror by my sick but fertile imagination. The sergeant himself doesn't really resemble a bird at all. He is a much too handsome hero in his early forties, with the moustache of a romantic cavalry officer of days gone by and the profile one finds in the expensive advertisements of fashion magazines. A movie projection, an exaggerated female dream.

Did I have to become all nervous because of his glossy image? Couldn't I just shrug my shoulders while I observed the sergeant's with-it, casual gear—the well fitting suit cut out of denim, the gay baby-blue-silk scarf knotted loosely under his strong but not uncharming chin? Couldn't I define his presence as merely irritating and keep listening to what the adjutant was saying? The adjutant spoke with just a touch of the wavy Amsterdam accent and looked at me sympathetically from pale-blue, deep-set eyes. He had a second chin and voluminous cheeks. Adjutant Grijpstra was regretting my father's sudden heart attack and mentioned that he thought it "embarrassing" that untimely Death had grabbed Dad from the arms of a woman he wasn't married to. He thought I might know my father's girl friend, the lady who left Dad in the grip of Fate, who ran away without even calling a doctor.

I tried to control my trembling lower lip. Surely I might be a little nervy. Wasn't I Dad's only child and couldn't I be expected to feel lost and alone? But if I lost my cool altogether, these sleuths, whose eyes were drilling into my face, might be led to believe in all sorts of dangerous conclusions. The interview, as the adjutant had said, was a formality—no more. They expected me to provide them with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

short and exact answers. If I could satisfy their curiosity, this painful interlude would quickly come to an end.

"Yes," I croaked. "She's an acquaintance. Her name is Monica and she's really my friend Hubert's—well, sort of mistress. I've known for a while that she rather liked Dad. He liked her, too. He was discreet, of course, but my mother died many years ago." (I didn't tell them how Mom met her end—information should never be too complete.) "And Monica is rather attractive and prefers older men." (I tried to smile in a knowledgeable way, for this is Amsterdam and we're supposed to know what's what in our wicked city.)

The adjutant was decent enough to accept my words in silence but the sergeant opened up. He saw a contrast between reality and my glib talk. Monica and Dad? An intimate relationship? And Monica was my friend Hubert's girl?

"Quite," I said firmly. Maybe it was my turn to throw out a question. "Isn't reality rather complicated at times? Look here, Monica is extraordinarily attractive. Hubert likes beauty—to admire, so to speak. He collects works of art and some of them are allowed to be alive. But she should never touch him, if you know what I mean. He allows Monica to be his companion. If there's anything more intimate she can offer, he doesn't want to know." That Hubert is fond of boys I didn't mention. Like Dad, I can be discreet. That conclusion could be theirs.

The detectives kept looking at me while they digested my information. What were they seeing? That I'm most intelligent? My I.Q. is high and I'm a sensitive person. If there are other assets to my character, I haven't noticed. I'm short, bald, only thirty-two years old, somewhat bent over, shy to a fault, and seem rather slavish, but I only project that modesty. Under my servility hides a dictator. I can, in a roundabout way, be ferociously aggressive. Know thouself, Socrates said. He also said that self-knowledge is almost impossible to achieve. But others, unfortunately, can see my self most easily.

I attempted to fathom what the gentle folks of the Murder Squad were thinking while they tipped their small cigars and stirred their coffee. They theorized that Hubert, if Monica loved my father with Hubert's permission, was giving instead of taking, even if Dad's passion did finally kill him. In my case, there could be motivation. Wasn't I Dad's sole heir? All his possessions passed to me—to wit, one profitable publishing company, one regal mansion just outside the city, and one Sixteenth Century restored gablehouse on the Emperor's Canal complete with a luxurious apartment on the upper

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

story, where Dad took his naps and occasionally spent the night. There was also cash, bonds, and shares.

Hubert wasn't getting any of the loot. So why should Hubert—this collector of beautiful objects, so far unknown to the detectives—instruct Monica in such a manner that she, by showing off her luscious lines of living flesh, should increase Dad's blood pressure to the point where a vein would burst and stop his works? It's pleasurable to try to analyze others' hidden thoughts, but only if the observer is a disinterested party. If he's part of what's going on, he may be squashed by the equation and, knowing that, sweat with fear.

Were Adjutant Grijpstra and Sergeant de Gier trying to prove any intent on my part? Princes are forever trying to usurp the king. I had read the murdering genre of literature and knew that heirs are the first to be suspected. But, really, was I a British prince in a Shakespearean tale or some ungodly shadow figure in an early Greek play? Nothing exotic, if you please—weren't we in the flat Netherlands where nothing out of the way is ever imagined behind our all-protecting dikes? Were these solid policemen really prepared to soil their placid minds with foreign poetry?

How much attention could they muster for that one single suspect circumstance? Monica wasn't present when the detectives answered the emergency call and entered the apartment furnished with antiques—but she did leave a trail. Her bag was found next to the bed. *She* was found that same night, in the bar at the Brewers' Canal, where she had stupefied herself with alcohol and the forgetful weed. Noteworthy: why hadn't Monica called a doctor? Why did she run when Dad had trouble breathing, held onto his neck, and groaned in agony? She said she had been unnerved and had escaped to the trusted support of her favorite tavern.

"But Miss—Mr. Habbema was obviously ill. Didn't you think you'd better be of help?"

"I thought he was angry with me."

Right. How clever to pretend to be drunk, stoned, and silly. It could be genuine. Dad wasn't altogether comatose, for he did manage to telephone his friend, the M.D. in his suburb. The doctor did show up, even if he had to leave a jolly party with friends.

Can a heart attack indicate murder? Isn't the connection a little far-fetched? Not to me. I read literature. Tanizaki in his subtle novel, *The Key,* makes a young wife excite her husband to the point of death. Was it accidental that the sergeant was playing with his keyring while he kept watching me stealthily through his long

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lashes? Hubert would be excited if he were the victim of such a quiet, veiled interrogation, but I'm sexually normal and felt severely harassed by the implications the sergeant's mime provoked.

So how about this Hubert, the sergeant wanted to know.

The police like straight lines. What do we have here now? Girl friend of third party in bed with the victim. How does the accusing pencil connect the given points? How well did I know this Hubert?

I replied in detail, for the line was missing the important point. Certainly—I had known Hubert for many years. We started school together and were joined right through university. Together we started our careers in publishing, but Hubert joined another firm that didn't compete with Habbema & Son, Incorporated. We're more in the popular sector, in herbs and health food and the mystical meadow.

While I write this, our latest project is on the table, an inane survey of telepathy in animals: *Do You Know Puss Can Read Your Thoughts?* That's pure nonsense. Cats can't read. They can't even think—at the most, they can feel a little. Whoever owns an animal knows that human moods can be sensed by animals and that they will react to the impulses we emit. This speechless contact is the subject of our book. The author, who, commissioned by my firm, fills two hundred pages on the simple subject, can't do much more than repeat himself in vague terms and quote some examples that are "clearified" by unprovable imagination. That's exactly what he did and we produced a striking dust-jacket, illuminating illustrations, and some artful photography. The reader will see what he should have known for some time confirmed in clear print. The book is meant to be a suitable Christmas present and can't do much harm, but for me it's depressing. Dad's trusted pussycat is still alive and set on revenge. The pliable animated plaything of the past is turning into a hellish tiger and snarls at me even when I put out his food.

Hubert's firm prints science for the universities and we entertain, but the positions that Hubert and I filled before Dad's death were about equal. We both served the capitalists above. Routine tasks humiliated our brilliant minds. Two Ph.D's sorting spelling mistakes. We demurred volubly during the many drunken hours we wasted in the bar at the Brewers' Canal, and Monica pretended to listen to our variations on the theme of self-pity. Her only gift was her beauty and we allowed her to tack onto us so we could have something to pride ourselves on. Her seductive presence confirmed our faith in ourselves and the possibility of eventually improving

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

our positions. How? By increasing our status. And what would we eventually do? Publish books ourselves. Which firm would give us our chance? Habbema & Son. What was in the way? Dad's everlasting presence.

Hubert and I generated the same idea simultaneously, after discussing a little Tanizaki. The sexual urge can destroy a man and make him a willing victim in the end. Would my father be willing? Tanizaki evolved no new thought—the urge has been around since the creation. There is no novelty in the basic themes, but variations and combinations are fortunately endless. The genetic codes are given and can, once they're understood, be used. Our joke would be another way of manipulating what circumstances offered so freely. Dad's high blood-pressure and Monica's beauty. 1 + 1 = 0. We ordered fresh drinks and winked at each other, Hubert and I. The zero of Dad's death amused us no end. While we were at it, we worked out the future.

Hubert, who likes to reach out and knows how to ensnare potential clients, would be our commercial director, earning top wages and entitled to spend his savings on part of the stock. I, with the majority of the shares, would fill in the background, control the final choice of work to be published, and be responsible for artwork and the general appearance of the product. Hubert would sell my creations. A deal? Hubert was delighted. "And I?" Monica asked.

"You want to work?" Hubert asked.

"Well, *work*—"

"You'll be on the payroll," I said at once, because we would need her and she had to stay around. "You'll be our hostess," Hubert said, "or something like it." He underlined his statement with a lopsided grin. We raised our glasses. She'd be worth every penny we would push her way, with her long slender legs, lovely bosom, tight waist, ever slightly opened, moist lips, and the eyes of an angel.

That's what Hubert was thinking, he's the expert of good taste. I'm a little more. My line of thinking always ends in a climax. Dad's climax this time. Dad was overweight, his hands trembled, and he walked with some trouble. He should not excite himself, his doctor friend kept repeating. I was forgetting at that time that Dad was also a kind old man, not just a fat fence that had to be kicked down to open our way.

"But," I said, "would a man of his age and condition still be capable of fulfilling his desire?"

Hubert, slurring his words, held forth on the power of positive

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thinking. Monica admired her delicate hands. So did I—I knew her hands quite well. They had been all over me often enough, with Hubert's approval. Hubert, my good friend, always willing to share. He only wanted Monica as a decoration. Waiter! More to drink! We did enjoy ourselves in our ghoulish way. I can see that now, a little late. Demons from the nether spheres: me in a dirty sweater and frayed jeans with a zipper broken by belly pressure, Hubert in his leather outfit set off with thin bright chains, Monica the living mannikin—a painted pawn pushed around by our smudgy hands. How clever we thought we were.

I'm writing all this down to analyze the goings-on and to formulate a clear confession. Read on, Adjutant Grijpstra and Sergeant de Gier. As you see, I'm behaving properly in the end, for he who says goodbye should do everything in his remaining power to cause the least trouble to those who remain on the human battlefield. I know the rules because I once heard two cops talking to each other, with me in the back seat of their patrol car, arrested for drunken driving. The officer at the wheel recalled that the previous night he had visited a home where a suicide had taken place. "Letter present?" the other cop asked. "Yes, he knew how to behave, poor sap." A decent chap who hadn't broken the last rule. Their man hung himself but pinned a note to his chest first. *Goodbye. Couldn't take any more of this.* Signed and all. No blame on another. That's why I'm typing away tonight—I'm expressing my error. I've failed sufficiently. When this envelope with contents reaches you, you can close your file.

Who is to blame? Monica had a bad youth. Abandoned as a child, she was raised in state homes, abused to a level where she could only withdraw into the remnants of herself—even to us, her companions of a latter day, she could only open up a little. She selected Hubert, whose perversion created distance, and me, whose ugly exterior matched the sadness of her soul.

I'm trembling now because I'm seeing more than I can stand and because the end is slipping into sight—the end of the torture, of my pain. But first I've to take proper care of the final formality. I'll have to call you and press the trigger afterward. I first intended the tiny projectile to enter my brain between the eyes, but I read somewhere that a .22 bullet—the instrument that's waiting so patiently next to my telephone isn't much more than an improved toy—may be too light and could get stuck in the bone of the forehead. It would be better to direct the shot through the mouth with the barrel pointed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slightly upward, then the mind can be reached easily from within. Oral and ultimate satisfaction. Not too tasty, however—I sucked the barrel just now. Pistol grease is sickly sweet.

Read on, upholders of the law. A son who murders his father is no good, I quite agree. We should be more careful, chipping away at our taboos, but people in your profession aren't too easily shocked. You'll take care of this, won't you? You'll write me off as a sinner who'll have to put up with his just rewards?

Dad was a good guy who looked after me well—and after Mom, too. But Mom paid no attention to traffic that afternoon of the past. No, please, I had nothing to do with that—I was in summer camp, at a safe distance. Dad's only weakness was his overeating. I inherited the trait and even the pets picked up the habit. Dad's weakness mattered to us conspirers, it came up during that fateful conversation in the bar that I haven't visited since then. "Where can your father be hit?" Hubert asked. "We got to know if we're going to manage this."

Dad fancied his snacks, but he could manage the problem—during the day, that is, when he followed doctor's instructions. At night the dog would wake him and he slipped into the kitchen. Together they sneaked about and emptied the refrigerator. Cheese, fat slices of ham, olives, pickles, buttered toast covered with sardines, creamy soups, the parties lasted for hours. To countereffect the results, Dad exercised a little and the dog climbed a step ladder. In the old days he could get off, but this last year Dad would have to pick him up and put him carefully on the floor. Then they returned to bed, after a visit to the bathroom and some intake of medications.

Hubert had seen the movie *La Grande Bouffe,* a melodrama in which elderly gents, suffering from incurable disease, exploded themselves with previous intent. "Something like that," Hubert said. "We arrange the final feast and he'll pop."

"Too difficult," I answered, "you underestimate Dad's defenses. We have religious genes, so guilt slows us down. If we're too coarse, he'll smell the devil. Don't forget that Albert Habbema, my grandfather, could start the publishing firm thanks to the sale of a collection of valuable antique Bibles he inherited from *his* dad. A little subtlety, old pal."

"Sex is subtle," Monica said, posturing gently.

Hubert moved an inch away from her. "Your father fancies women?" he asked me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From the Perry Mason, Hercule Poirot and Nero Wolf whodunits to Dick Francis thrillers and the immortal James Bond...

Track down ALL the best-selling hard-to-find Mystery and Suspense you're after... in low-cost paperbacks.

If you crave the excitement and adventure of good mystery and suspense but hate waiting in line to buy your favorites...If you buy a lot but hate to pay expensive hardcover prices...If you want them all but don't want to join a book club ...It's time you discovered the **other** way to buy the bestsellers. A way that's quick, convenient and easy on your pocketbook—The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Paperback Catalog!

Over 700 Titles to choose from!

If you shopped for months you'd never find the 100's of bestsellers you find in minutes in The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Paperback Catalog. Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, P.D. James, Rex Stout, Erle Stanley Gardner, Ellery Queen...all the best mystery, suspense and adventure storytellers. Not just one or two of an author's titles, but everything in print! And the largest selection of popular adult mystery and suspense available. Over 700 titles in all, from hard-to-find to soon-to-be released. All in the most inexpensive paperback editions!

Having The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Paperback Catalog is like having the bookstore come to you. Not just any bookstore. But one that specializes in hair-raising thrillers! And unlike high pressure clubs there are no catches or rules. You buy any number of books when **you** want to buy them. No "automatic shipments" of books you never ordered but have to pay for!

Easy ordering, fast delivery!

Ordering from The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Paperback Catalog is easy. You can charge books by mail or over the phone (for even speedier service). No waiting on out-of-stock titles ...our giant inventory ensures prompt delivery. Right to your door, of course. And you pay only a minimum handling charge for the luxury of shopping at home—unhurried and hassle-free.

How to Order your Shop-At-Home Catalog Right Away.

To receive The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Catalog, send $1.00 with the coupon below. Then sit back and prepare for excitement in the comfort of your armchair...at prices you can always afford. Shopping at home for bestsellers. Once you've tried it, you'll find there is no other way.

☐ I want to shop at home for best-selling mystery and suspense at low paperback prices! Rush me The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Paperback Catalog. I've enclosed $1.00 to cover postage and handling.

☐ Send me all five Shop-At-Home Paperback Catalogs —Mystery and Suspense, Western, Sci-Fi, Romance, and Fiction/Non-Fiction. I've enclosed $2.00 to cover postage and handling.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Mail coupon to:

BOOK MAILING SERVICE
Box 690 Dept. AH-4
Rockville Center, NY 11571

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Surely," I said brightly, paying no attention to his expression of disgust.

Dad didn't practice sex, of course. A proper widower, he was well in control of lower lust. "However—"

"Yes?" Hubert asked eagerly, trying to dry his hands on the smooth leather of his jacket. "Let's have it, comrade."

He knew this approach always caught me off guard. To call me comrade meant a direct appeal to the core of our friendship. We had been comrades at kindergarten when we defended ourselves against the gang of bullies. We were both minorities, all the others were healthy and sane. Together we managed through the early and later formative years. Friendship? I'm not so sure any more. Fear kept us together and we became each other's shadows, shadows that darkened with the years, a composition of black shades to which Monica later joined hers.

I told Hubert what I knew about Dad's sex secrets. There was a family gathering and Dad, drunk, beckoned me over and made me sit at his feet. We mellowly discussed erotic pleasures. The next day he avoided me, but by then I knew more. "Nothing in this world," he had said dreamily, "excites me more than the female bosom." He told me about his very early youth when, as a boxed-in baby, he rattled his fence when his nurse stripped slowly to titillate her captive audience. He would get so frantic he was attacked by hiccups and had to be lifted out and fondled, and he would fondle in return. "Amazing," Dad said, "such a strong memory, the very first. I wasn't two years old."

I thought that was it and wanted to rejoin the party, but Dad's hand restrained me. The nurse stayed with the family, and later, when Dad was in puberty, lured him to her attic, for the game wasn't over. The fondling continued, but was never fulfilled for she was religious and believed that complete enjoyment had to be reserved for the heavenly spheres. Eventually, though, the couple was caught, by furious Granddad, and Nurse was thrown out, sobbing, dragging her bursting carton suitcase.

"But," Dad said, "the desire clung."

And now the clash of cymbals, clanging in my ears, after Dad had tipped back his umpteenth glass of genever and said, "Nurse looked just like your friend Monica."

"*Right,*" Hubert shouted when I told him. "Where there's a will there's a way. Good luck is with the relentless pursuer. Our adventure is blessed."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dad knew Monica well. I often took her home with Hubert and the four of us would dine together. Dad had always been most polite when addressing our companion. How could I have guessed that she resembled the lurid influence of his early days? If he hadn't told me, he might still be alive. But did we have a choice? I often wonder.

Hubert instructed Monica in the fine art of seduction. I assisted his efforts. I suggested to Dad that our garden needed a new design and that my friends would like nothing better than to join the project. While we dug, Hubert and I—for this was manly work and Dad was too old and Monica too tender—and carried rocks, raked gravel, and constructed a bamboo gate, Monica was left with Dad. On the back porch, well out of our sight, Monica displayed her curves in the smallest of bikinis. Even when she dressed, she kept up the show—Dad wasn't given a moment of respite.

"This is like Nazi Germany," Hubert said, lugging bags of soil or sinking more lilies in the pond. "Much beauty was created there before the Power showed its true face."

We were imbeciles, knowing full well what was dragging us along and never pausing to see what was what.

Hubert developed some muscle and I lost a large number of pounds. We heard Dad laugh and Monica titter from the seclusion of the back porch. Dad didn't want to give in, but he was sorely tempted. The seduction took a month. Meanwhile, the garden developed nicely. Hubert egged Monica on—autumn was on the way and we were chopping wood for the open fire by then. Monica finally managed to convince Dad of her sincere longing for his elderly caresses. The merriment on the porch gave way to deep silence. Then they became absent—Dad preferred the privacy of his city apartment. Sin shies away from an audience. Dad died in secret and Monica's panic made her run away, leaving her telltale bag that invited the Murder Squad into my office.

"So your father had an affair with the young lady," Adjutant Grijpstra said. "I can't say the situation is clear to me, but I think we have bothered you enough for today." He left, followed by the impeccably attired sergeant, who turned at the door to scan me with his steady gaze.

Today. The word they left hung heavily between my walls. There was always tomorrow, as they intended me to understand. The suspicion, the charge in the sergeant's gaze was clear enough. I understood that he almost understood my motivation. For look here, although the facts still underlined my innocence, something was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wrong. Monica was Hubert's girl friend. Hubert was gay. Monica was most attractive and I was not. Dad's death moved all his property to me. The case smelled foully on all sides, but the catchers of ghouls were short of proof as long as my resistance lasted. Cops catch the wicked, but their power is restricted and it doesn't often happen that they meet the perpetrators while they're actually doing wrong. Their main task is preventive. They're around and they stay around, making sure you won't forget their presence. And while they're around, the sinner may weaken.

Grijpstra and de Gier visited me twice again. After that they stayed away. Insufficiency of proof and what did they care anyway? Detectives of the Murder Squad are always ankle deep in a quagmire of sticky evil—they could put up with the little I was adding. Whenever they visited, they allowed me to talk, observing me meanwhile, informing me wordlessly that they thought I was a slimy example of everything they abhorred. As if I needed their quiet attack. Of criticism I had a sufficiency, and it was all my own.

Fine. Dad's dead and the company is mine. Hubert showed up the very next day to remind me of my promise to make him a director. Monica appeared and lay down on the visitor's couch. I tried to convince them that some patience might be better, but Hubert called me comrade and Monica became erotic.

I knew then I would have to be rid of them. The friendship, if our connection was ever friendly, reminded me of the wrong we had done together. How does one remove nasty people for once and for all?

To separate myself from Hubert was easy enough. Hubert always underestimated me, a mistake that has terminated many a criminal mind. When you grow up together, there's enough opportunity to weigh the other. He should have remembered that my Ph.D. was cum laude, that I never lose a game of chess, and that in confrontations I always slide out unscratched in the end.

What was Hubert's weakness? Which circumstances needed to be combined? I had money, Hubert hadn't. Hubert had expensive tastes, and his worst was his longing for rough male company. He liked to be with motorcyclists with bulging biceps. Bullies can be bought, especially when they're on drugs, and I found just the type in a junkies' café who, in spite of his lack of brain further reduced by addiction, grasped fairly quickly what I wanted of him. I didn't tell him that Hubert's skull was thin and that, as a kid, he almost died

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

because he fell off his bike and cracked his head. I did mention that Hubert likes to be hurt, especially on the head, if possible with a chain.

Hubert also liked to get drunk at times. I took him to the miserable quarters where the leatherboys hang out and introduced him to my burly acquaintance. I gave money to the tough. "Have a good time, boys," I told them. Amazing how easy it all was. Hubert was found in the morning, dying of a bleeding skull—he had been nicely arranged between two piles of garbage. He mumbled as he died. A prayer? The alley is called Prayer Without End, for it's circular and bites its own tail.

Monica was a little more tricky, but as Hubert had said, where there's a will there's a way. I knew her inside out and *her* weak spot was obvious. She was allergic to monosodiumglutamate, the taste improver professional cooks use so that they can serve appetizing leftovers. The chemical also tenders meat. MSG never failed to upset Monica's stomach. It also made her dizzy and when she consumed a lot of it she was apt to faint.

I bought a bright little red can filled with MSG.

With Hubert gone, his share in Monica became mine, too. Our more intimate relationship brought along more duties. She asked for presents and I bought her an Italian sportscar with a long dainty nose. She liked to race in traffic. As she was a good driver, my hope wasn't fulfilled soon. Hence the can of the weakener of Monica's defenses.

Oh, yes—something else. Monica was vain.

All factors were available and the day came that they would fit. We were on holiday in Paris and I took her to a three-star restaurant, close to the circular road that spans the inner city. Monica loved to race that highway, all day if need be, and she would change lanes with inches to spare from the others' fenders.

At lunch that day I was friendly enough and ordered her favorite delicacy, a filet mignon topped with rare mushrooms.

"What's wrong with your hair, dear?" I asked just as she was ready to dig in.

"Doesn't it look right?"

"No, it's all windblown. You look ridiculous."

She repaired to the rest room and I sprinkled the glutamate on her steak, pressing it in with my fork so the white flakes wouldn't show. When Monica returned, she ate, becoming irritated by my sarcastic remarks. She hardly ever lost her temper, but she was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

especially sensitive to criticism about her grammar. Never having been to school much, she expressed herself poorly. I said that it's very nice if a woman is attractive but that beauty is only skin deep and a man does appreciate intelligence after a while. She became furious and left. I had placed the car keys on the table so that she could grab them as she stalked out. We were staying at a hotel around the corner and she knew where she could locate me once the anger passed.

I got up, shouted another insult after her, sat down, and ordered cognac. She must have been squashed while I was on my second refreshment.

The gendarmes showed me later how the accident must have taken place.

Madame had been speeding—well over a hundred, they thought. Apparently experts can determine speed from measuring tire tracks. Hers had been short and cut through the railing that supposedly protects the highway. Monica's car made short work of it and then flew down, landing eventually on a crossing—and a Parisian in a Renault, father of four kids, on his way home after working late at his office.

That nice, dead, harmless monsieur got too much for me. He appears in all my dreams and keeps asking whether I couldn't have arranged my personal problem a little better. "Four little children, monsieur!"

Dad's pets pursue me, too. The dog is off his food and suffers from neurotic itch, and the cat waits for me in hidden corners, to leap out and hiss and claw. The cat used to be my pal once, she would bring me crumpled papers and expect me to throw them and then bring them back. Siamese cats do that if they truly like you. I need medication to fall asleep and then instead of resting I keep murdering my father and my friends. Each night they die again, out of breath, clutching their broken heads, flattened in a wrecked sportscar, and the French office worker keeps returning to tell me about his starving kids.

Adjutant Grijpstra left his visiting card, with the request to call him if something cropped up. Very well, something has. I won't disturb you personally, Adjutant, although your private number is printed on your card—but it's evening now and I imagine your wife has just brought you your coffee and you're about to watch a nature film on TV. I'll call your radio room. The officers who will take care of my conclusion will deliver this note . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Report of the Radio Room, Police Headquarters, Amsterdam
—January, 198–; time: 19.37 hours
Dialogue as taped:

"Hello, the police?"

(Yes.)

"Listen. My name is Peter Habbema and I'm phoning from my office, Habbema & Son, Incorporated, Emperors Canal 610. I'm going to shoot myself."

(Don't do that, sir.)

"What was that?"

(Repeat.)

"Don't do that? Come, officer. This is a neat city. Garbage has to be cleared away."

(Mister Habbema—)

"No, just a minute, please. There's a letter all ready for you, addressed to your detectives. I've left nothing out. Motivation. Why it's gotten as far as this. Crime and punishment. All I have to do now is pull this little trigger."

(Clicking sound.)

"What's this now? Just a click? Aha, I see it. The safety is still on—I'm never handy with technical stuff. This way now, up she goes, and ready to fire. See this? The red dot is visible. There we go."

(Sound of a gunshot.)

Report of Patrolcar Number 6/7
—January, 198–; time: 19.54 hours

We found the lifeless body of a male. Letter present.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Battery Sergeant Major in the Great War, Uncle Gerald won a medal in Flanders. But he sort of shrank up and got old after a year or two of Doreen Beavis . . .

THE CREAKY BOARD

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Hetty—I've only heard her called Henrietta once, by the vicar when we were married—nods loyally when I ride my hobby-horse and lay down the law, but about once a year she jars me out of the saddle. It's a hell of a thing.

To get to the point—soon after we got married, the firm gave me a step up. The snag was that it also meant several thousand steps away from the London suburb where the pair of us had been born and bred. If I wanted to be a manager, it had to be at Dockbury Green in the farthest West of England.

The company paid for our hotel until we found a home, though obviously they expected that to take place within a month at most. One chap did spin it out for the best part of half a year but it was costly freeloading because that was the end of his promotions.

Dockbury Green was a problem—a village conveniently near the railway main line and a new motorway, where an industrial estate had sprung up in a matter of eighteen months. There were plenty of houses for newcomers but unfortunately they all looked as if they'd been spilt from the same giant Monopoly board onto the same trio of estates laid out in army-barracks style.

After three weeks—which meant only six days of weekends when Hetty and I were free to explore—we were getting desperate. Somerset Maugham says the worst decisions to reach are those where the outcome is obvious from the start. Reading that at school, I'd thought it a daft remark but now its wisdom struck home. We kept entering Monopoly houses where the "master bedroom" was just about large enough for both arms to be raised to shoulder level at the same time, looking at each other, and blenching. Hetty would sigh, "Well, we aren't going to be here forever." Ironically, this would

© 1985 by Jeffry Scott.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be our first real home—we'd been living with Hetty's mum and dad—and it was turning into a penance instead of a joy.

On the afternoon of Day Six, we were just riding around, unwilling to admit defeat but certain of it. Hetty hadn't said a word for half an hour and neither had I. We weren't sulking but conversation was unwelcome.

"Stop the car!"

It was safe to, so I did. But there was no reason. We were on a minor road some six miles from Dockbury Green, holly hedge one side, blank stone wall the other, a lot of empty tarmac ahead and behind.

She said: "I saw a lane back there when we came round the bend. *Please,* Harry."

Five minutes later, we were at the entry. Easy to miss, because a froth of cow parsley nodded out into the gap. It looked just wide enough to take the car, which was a Mini. "We've only just got time to see that flat before the estate agency closes," I reminded Hetty.

"P-please, Harry." Which made me frown. When Hetty goes red and stammers and gets that impossible expression, both charming and shifty, she's having a wild streak.

"Look, darling, that lane probably leads to a barn or just a field. Doesn't *go* anywhere."

Hetty looked at me as if I was simple. "Of course it does." This was her first visit to the county, let alone this obscure corner. It didn't make sense. Sooner than ponder the implications, I headed the car up the lane.

There was no barn at the end of it. Just a cottage.

Now there are cottages and cottages. This one was larger than most estate houses we'd rejected but at the same time small enough to seem cozy. Walls of matched flints, unusual in this region. Weathered tile roof mellowed to a lovely rose pink. Following the line of the eaves, fairly recently painted green, ran those curly Victorian timber bits known as bargeboards.

"Ah," Hetty breathed. Her tone was of finding something she'd forgotten was mislaid or retrieving a stubborn word that had been at the tip of her tongue all day.

"It's not for sale," I said.

She pulled a face. "It will be one day. No harm in asking to look round." And she was out of the car while I was still spluttering.

There were three stone steps up to the front path. "Come back," I told her. "Hetty, you can't just—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By the time I'd unhitched the seatbelt, she'd tapped the gleaming brass Lincoln Imp knocker, the front door was opening, and it was too late. I felt awful. Maybe America is different, but I daresay passing strangers don't get much of a welcome if they stop at the first attractive home and suggest a guided tour.

The woman was, putting it kindly, rather past middle age—one of those people frozen in their youth, though in Miss Appey's case there was no suggestion of mutton dressing up as lamb. She wore checked carpet slippers, a faded overall over a dress whose hemline hardly cleared the slippers, and a scarf tied into a turban. She could have stepped out of a 1940s propaganda movie, one of the Decent Little People proving that Britain Could Take It.

Hetty said, more or less in a single breath, "I'm Hetty Belling and this is my husband Harry, we've been married nearly a year, and I've fallen in love with your house."

"There!" Miss Appey exclaimed, eyes popping behind thick spectacles. "There! That fool Jessie Edmonds has been on at me since poor Uncle Gerald died about getting a For Sale board put up, and I told her, 'When Keeper's Cottage is ready to be sold, there'll be somebody ready to buy it.' "

Total illogicality. Yet Hetty and Miss Appey were beaming and nodding at each other, well satisfied at the way things had turned out. Mistaking my look, Miss Appey explained, "All this used to be the one estate, Sir George's place—the gamekeeper lived here, it was built for him."

"That's nice," I mumbled.

Her shared look with Hetty dismissed me. "The kettle's on," she said. "Now I know why I bought a big loaf this morning, *and* shop cake. Do come in, we'll have a nice chat." And they did, for an hour or more. Within ten seconds I knew I'd be either living here eventually or somewhere else, such as a bachelor bedsitter, without Hetty.

Actually, the talk was quite interesting—unless I was in the honeymoon period of country life, when the most banal gossip has value in making you a local by proxy. Miss Appey was on holiday from her housekeeper post in Dockbury Green, having "buried Uncle Gerald last week." It was hard to keep a poker face, since the lady had arms like a stevedore and a bustling, homespun competence suggesting that she could have dug the grave herself and even assembled the casket.

Not that she was watching me. I wasn't snubbed, exactly—Hetty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Miss Appey simply treated me as momentarily irrelevant. Only once did she address me, with a trace of defiance. "You'll think it silly, Mr. Belling, but Uncle Gerald had a very happy life here." She put her head on one side as if listening to herself. "Well, he did eventually. For years and years, to the end. I want his home to—have a good home, in a manner of speaking."

"It will," Hetty broke in, and the woman patted her hand and assented, "I know, luv, I know."

Trying to change the subject, for one doesn't get house-purchase bargains by showing every sign of grabbing the place while still on the doorstep, I asked, "How d'you mean *eventually?*"

Miss Appey turned to Hetty again. "Oh, it wasn't the cottage, my dear. Just a certain person in it. Uncle Gerald was Sir George's gamekeeper, see. Then most of the estate was broken up, sold for death duties. The new folk kept him on as handyman and caretaker. They were never here, so he took another job as well—doorman at the Ritz Kinema in Dockbury Green."

Her mouth went down at the corners and her eyes bulged. "That's how he met Doreen Beavis as was. She was no fool, she could tell Uncle Gerald was a warm man, money in the Post Office Savings Bank, and she married him. In 1937. I was a bridesmaid—though how *that* one had the cheek to wear white."

"No better than she ought to be, Doreen?" I suggested. Hetty shot me a killer glance. But Miss Appey, slightly surprised at my understanding, nodded several times.

"*Ex*-accly! She was a foreigner, see, from Bristol. Dragged up any old how in some slum, I daresay. Her and her crony Veronica Pitts were notorious in Dockbury. Well, never mind! Doreen led poor Uncle Gerald a life, I can tell you. My dad wanted him to chuck her out, get a divorce, but Uncle Gerald was proud and he was shy and he couldn't a-bear the thought of causing a scandal, having his name in the *Dockbury Weekly Ledger* and all that.

"He was a fine set-up man, Uncle Gerald. Battery Sergeant Major in the Great War, won a medal in Flanders. But he sort of shrunk up and got old after a year or two of Madam. Then the war started, Hitler's war, and the troops was swarming over Dockbury Green and Doreen and Veronica—well. She was more away from here than not, days at a stretch. Then she ran off with one of the soldiers and Veronica Pitts was run over by an army lorry the very same week. Good riddance to bad rubbish, twice over."

Miss Appey sniffed with a relish that, while unChristian, was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

very human. "I'd stopped coming here while Doreen was lady of the house. Lady! She and that Veronica Pitts would be lounging about in Uncle Gerald's nice front room, making it stink of cigarettes and their nasty scent, whispering and giggling and rolling their eyes and making fun of him in front of me. I couldn't bear it.

"But Uncle took a turn for the better after she run off. The manager of the Ritz Kinema got called up—killed in Burma, *he* was, infantry captain. Hard to imagine him being that, him and his lovely stiff white shirt and dicky-bow tie, telling us there was plenty of seats in the shilling section but no sixpenny ones. Anyway, Uncle Gerald ran the Ritz right through the war, and he was in the Home Guard. It made a new man of him. He was past ninety years of age, a very happy and contented old gentleman, when he slipped away in his sleep at the General Hospital."

Fascinating stuff—*Dynasty* with a Thomas Hardy accent—but nothing to do with buying the cottage, it struck me. Hetty nodded and said, "Perfect. We'll keep it a happy place. Neither of us smoke, Miss Appey, either."

"I don't doubt it," said Miss Appey. "I'll have a word with Uncle Gerald's solicitor, Mr. Gavin. Bine, Gavin, and Bine are in Corn Street by the railway station, my dear. You see Mr. Gavin on Monday and we'll start the wheels rolling."

Struggling not to sound indignant and sarcastic, I nudged Hetty and murmured, "Shouldn't we look around?"

"We're going to, idiot," she agreed. "But I know we'll take it."

It turned out that Miss Appey's word with the lawyer had been a generous one, because Keeper's Cottage asking price was at least 1,000 pounds less than I had been prepared to pay. We moved in by the end of the month.

Thanks to Miss Appey's elbow grease—for forty years she'd spent all her spare time with Uncle Gerald, maintaining Keeper's Cottage like her own houseproud quarters at the Market Hotel in Dockbury Green—and to Hetty's choice of decor, there were no traces of Uncle Gerald or his faithless Doreen indoors.

But in the shed I found a tarnished, 1916 vintage empty shell case, evidently converted to an umbrella stand, with the Royal Artillery badge brazed to its neck. And a mildewed album of photographs. Uncle Gerald *had* been the fine upstanding man of his niece's memory. The sepia snapshots showed a six-footer, broad shouldered, with a fierce moustache.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Slipped into the back of the album, spotted now with iron mold, was a more recent picture—his wedding to Doreen Beavis. Miss Appey, I noted, had been a cheery and nearly pretty frog in her girlhood. As for Doreen, it was hard to tell—her veil was unhelpfully concealing and, in any case, the sexpots of bygone decades generally travel badly.

From the cabinet photograph's less-faded margins, I gathered that it had been taken out of its original frame. When I brought the relics to Hetty, her reaction was mixed. "Uncle Gerald! We'll let Miss Appey choose her favorites and I'll make a sort of collage of the rest, hang it at the turn of the stairs. It's his cottage, after all."

But the wedding picture, after a hostile, pursed-lips study, was rejected. "I don't like that. Poor old man, he took it down when she left him but he couldn't bear to tear it up. How that woman hurt him!"

Hetty thrust it at me face-down, and I noticed the ornate rubber-stamped announcement on the back: *Julian Pethwicke, Studio Portraitist, Market Chambers, Dockbury Green.*

"Throw it away," Hetty insisted. "I'd hate Miss Appey to see it again." She and Miss Appey were great buddies, visiting back and forth, Miss Appey giving my wife gardening hints and taking them on embroidery.

"It'll be on the bonfire as soon as I've had my cup of tea," I assured her. "That wedding photographer. Pethwicke's an unusual name. I wonder whether there's a tie-in to Tim Pethwicke."

"Huh," Hetty observed. She didn't approve of Tim Pethwicke, a local auctioneer we'd met through Rotary lunches, and much as I enjoyed his company in small doses she had a point. The doses tended to be large in terms of alcohol, and fraught with hangovers.

We were, as the Georgians tactfully put it, "flown with wine" when I remembered to ask Tim about the photograph weeks later.

"Julian Pethwicke was my grampa," he said, and grinned ruefully. "Wicked old bastard, too! Oh, these days he'd hardly raise an eyebrow even in Dockbury Green, but during the Thirties and Forties—" He whistled clumsily and shook invisible drops of water from his fingertips, upsetting a fortunately empty glass.

"How d'you mean, Tim? Was he a tough nut, then?"

"Grampa? Don't make me laugh." He did, all the same. "No, he was a stud and swinger long before his time. Mention his name at home when I was a kid and a horrible silence fell. No, it didn't fall,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it was gradually apparent. A bit like treacle. How'd you even know the old buzzard existed?"

I explained about the wedding picture. Tim communed with himself for a full two minutes, abstractedly filling and disposing of a glass of burgundy the while. "Yes, I'd forgotten about the Two Disgraces . . ."

He surfaced, saw my puzzlement, and chuckled. "Doreen and Veronica were the semi-pro hookers of Dockbury Green—the Two Disgraces." He was interested enough to put the glass aside.

"This is all hearsay, mind. The leading actors were long gone by the time I was of an age to home in on them. But my father—well, you've met the Squadron Leader—he's desperately ashamed of *his* father. I heard stray remarks and sniggers at the grammar school, asked Dad about them, and he spilt the beans. Trying to make a bit of a joke of it.

"Old Julian Pethwicke was a pretty good photographer and got most of the carriage-trade business this end of the county, plus most of the odds-and-ends, like Doreen's wedding. That's how he met her, and it wasn't long before he'd added her to his string." Tim grinned. "Grampa was a notorious lecher, but up to then he'd set his sights high. Everybody wondered why he slummed with the cinema-porter's wife. But he and Doreen and Veronica were thick as thieves—though thieving wasn't their game." Raising an imaginary, wobbly camera, he clicked his tongue. "Filthy pictures. Doreen's fee was for Grampa to keep the relationship going. Veronica got free prints and peddled them, keeping her happy. But around 1942 the roof fell in.

"Grampa had Veronica and a few other runners doing a roaring trade in porn around the army camps. He made the runners keep the stuff on *their* premises, he wasn't a fool. But somehow the coppers rumbled him."

I said, "It must have been a terrible scandal."

Tim snorted and shook his head. "Here in Dockbury Green? Grow up, Harry. Gramp's uncle had been mayor, don't forget. My dad, his only son, was the local hero, Battle of Britain pilot. No—they just closed Grampa down and he got packed off to—I dunno, the Outer Hebrides or the Orkneys, taking pictures of airfield construction for the Ministry of Information. Where he duly caught pneumonia from exposure and snuffed it."

He divided the last of the bottle between our glasses and raised his own.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Toast to Grampa, the rotten old bounder: Absent friends!"

I didn't share the disgraceful anecdote with Hetty—she would have been more pained than amused. And somehow, with Uncle Gerald in sepia at the turn of the stairs, a decent man who had always done his duty, it'd have seemed vaguely in bad taste and almost a breach of hospitality.

Early the following year, Hetty told me our family would be three strong by Christmas. The only person happier than ourselves was Miss Appey, an honorary auntie by then. "Uncle would love to have seen it," she said. "A baby growing up here!"

The ladies took to long, absurdly premature shopping expeditions in the car, leaving me at a loose end. I had already repapered the second bedroom—*not* premature, just sensibly far-sighted—and was wiring in an extra power plug for the nightlight when I noticed a persistently squeaky board—the last thing needed in a nursery. I'd had abundant horror stories from colleagues about babies getting by on minimal slumber at night, waking at the drop of a feather. In any case, we intended to put freshly fitted carpet down, so on a lonely Saturday afternoon I pulled up the old carpet, removed all the stubborn, rusty tacks—last touched in the 1920s from their appearance—and tidied away an antique snowdrift of *Daily Mirrors* and *Sporting Lifes* doing duty as underlay.

The board—by the dents in that thin old carpet, beneath the head of the bed—creaked because it had been sawn through at one end, leaving a section some eleven inches long with a knot pushed out. Leaving a hole by which to lift it. A trapdoor.

Snugly fitting beneath, resting on a joist, was a square biscuit tin with a dusty view of Venice on the lid. I was so excited it took frustratingly long to lever the thing out.

Finally it came up, toppling over so that the lid sprang free. Photographs cascaded out, postcard size, thin paper, at least fifty of them—Uncle Gerald's wife Doreen in three different poses displaying explicit gynaecological nastiness.

Tim Pethwicke's grandfather had not put his ornate rubber stamp on the backs of these.

I'd seen enough within a few heartbeats. I was puritanically glad to have found them, all the same. It made no sense—what the eye doesn't see, and so forth—but I didn't want our baby sleeping on top of such bygone smut. Any more than over a nest of snakes or a dead body.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was shoveling them back into the tin when the texture of paper changed and I realized that something else had been on top before the container overturned—two old-fashioned five-pound notes, like large white napkins embroidered in Gothic-lettered black, and a sheet of lined notepaper.

Taking the letter to the window—the writing was faintly pencilled but legible—I read:

April 3, 1942

Dear Ronny—

I wish you hadn't gone off with so-called "Polish officer" for the weekend when I need you. I bet when you come back he will have ponced every last penny off you and make Him Self scarce. If hes an officer I am Winny Churchill!

Talking of chances, I hope you will never read this because when I see you cumming up the path as per usuall I will take this out of our hidey Hole because I will feel a right fool.

What it is, Gerry has got very funny the last few days. Calls me hor and that but now he wont touch me which always did the trick before. I am shur he is only trying to scare me like the Bogey Man but he has dug a big thing he says is a slit-trench in the woods. I saw him at it and he says its for Home Gards. You know Gerry can get funny from that bang on the head he got in France last war. I am shur its only that.

But just in case I have worned him he better not do anything or you will find out. This is not mere empty words Ronny because you are such a greedy cow (joke) you are bound to come here when you get back and Gerry is off at work.

You will open the Safe to get more pics (see the latest what a pot Im gettin) and find this note. If Im gone a long time and dont turn up. I hop you get my drift because it is hard to explain when chances are a million to one I will be here and you wont read this.

I mean if you do find this it means what ever he says I am not gone away to pals or off with a bloke. He would say that. I have no inntentian of moving from this spot (only to dances, flicks, pubs and like that) so if Gerry says that it will be lies and he done something mad.

I feel beter allready putting this down in Black and White

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

because Gerry is just a blowhard and full of hot air to frighten me and Work on my nervs he can be a right basterd and not greatfull for me putting up with him so much.

Look after your Self kiddie. All the best,

Doreen

Uncle Gerald's wife *had* been alleged to have "gone off with a bloke." Veronica, greedy farmyard stock or no, hadn't opened the cache because she had been killed in a road accident. And eventually Uncle Gerald had died, too—full of years, happy and contented.

"We found the carry-cot," Hetty called back to me from the front porch.

"Found the very one!" Miss Appey brandished the giant brown-paper parcel by way of proof.

Nose wrinkling, my wife shouted, "Harry, you're some kind of pyromaniac! I can't turn my back before you've started another smelly bonfire. What are you burning now?"

I looked at her, and at Miss Appey. What earthly use could there be in setting the record straight, taking that tin box to the police? "Weeds and rubbish," I called back, opening the box and shaking it out into the chortling flames. "Weeds and rubbish, ladies."

"Q"

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions, including change of address, should be sent to P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

First story author #633 Brendan DuBois has lived in New Hampshire all his life. After receiving a bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Hampshire, he worked for a few years as a newspaper reporter and now works for a private-investigation agency. His wife Carolyn is a journalist.

He walked up the main boulevard, a long row of open shops, bars, motels, video arcades, and fast-food restaurants. Lights flickered and there was the screaming jangling of the video games and the smell of pizza, fried dough, and popcorn. The cement sidewalk was crowded with tourists and beachgoers, and on his right two lanes of one-way traffic inched north. He felt the quivering inside of him again and his palms were moist. A good sign. He would be lucky tonight.

Have you caught the author's ominous mood? Read on . . .

DARK CORRIDOR

by BRENDAN DuBOIS

It was getting on toward dark when he decided it was time to go out and try again. He had spent three days so far at this beach resort in a motel room, coming back unsuccessful early each morning, falling asleep on the bed after taking only his boots off. He had relaxed that afternoon, knowing he wouldn't go out and work again until the sun had set, and he had swum thirty laps in the motel pool, keeping to himself and ignoring the bikini-clad women reclining about him, steaming in their suntan oil. The one he was looking for wasn't at the pool, and he was sure he would find her tonight and finish the job.

He came out of the small bathroom, wiping the flecks of shaving cream from his chin. It was a clean room, as rooms go, and in the past two years he had stayed in so many they seemed to blend

© 1985 by Brendan DuBois.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

together in his mind. This one had a double bed, color television, a small writing desk, and a bureau with a mirror. His suitcase was under the bed and only his coat was hanging in the closet. A large window looked over the beach—Tyler Beach, it was called—and the white sands that stretched to the Atlantic.

He was in New Hampshire. He wasn't sure if he had ever been in New Hampshire before. The map with the little red dots that charted the places he had been in the past two years was stashed in the trunk of his car. That would tell him, but it wasn't important now. It was time to get dressed. In the little buzzing and quivering in the back of his mind, he could feel it all right—he would get it done tonight.

After pulling on his worn jeans, black T-shirt, and leather jacket, he slipped on his boots and looked at himself in the mirror, combing his shower-wet black hair and trying to hide most of the furrowed pink scar that angled down from his forehead to his ear. He frowned at his image in the mirror, smiled, and then touched the scar once almost tenderly.

Two years. He had once worked at a newspaper, sitting at a computer terminal, editing copy and dummying pages. Then came the day at work when a piece of scaffolding collapsed and cracked his skull with a sound like a pistol shot.

The next few months had been odd, waking up and sleeping, fading in and out, and after his discharge he had tried to go back to the newspaper. But there were the headaches, the damn headaches, and the bright lights and images that came whenever he closed his eyes, and in another month he was gone from the paper, receiving a disability check every week. There had been some brain damage, but the doctors were never quite sure how much or what kind. It was hard to remember what they had said. It was even hard to remember what newspaper he had worked at or what city he had come from. It was out in the Midwest somewhere, that was all he could be sure of. That, and the memory of the images and impulses that came to him during the time at the hospital.

He knelt down and dragged his suitcase from underneath the bed. It had a combination lock and when he opened it he removed his tools for the night's work. The 9 mm. pistol went into an ankle holster and the folded stiletto went snug into his jeans. The wire garrote, with its two thumb loops, went into his jacket. He flexed his hands after standing up, took a deep breath, and went out the door, locking it behind him . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Outside, the night air was clear and cool, with a salty tang from the ocean. He walked up the main boulevard, a long row of open shops, bars, motels, video arcades, and fast-food restaurants. Lights flickered and there was the screaming jangling of the video games and the smell of pizza, fried dough, and popcorn. The cement sidewalk was crowded with tourists and beachgoers, and on his right two lanes of one-way traffic inched north. Streetlights and neon signs kept everything bright. He walked along, eyes and ears open, letting everything sink into him. He felt the quivering inside of him again and his palms were moist. A good sign. He would be lucky tonight.

He stopped at a newsstand for a paper and sat on a nearby park bench. He flipped through the pages, not only reading the stories but checking how the editors and paste-up people had laid out the stories and chosen the headlines. It was one of the few links he had to the time before the accident. All that happened after the accident had remained with him, but everything before then was murky and dark. It was like trying to remember the day-to-day events of an August month when you were only five years old.

Newspapers were the one thing he liked to read. He liked comparing the ones he picked up in his travels, from the big dailies to the small weeklies that ran feed-store ads on the front page. The stories were always interesting.

Sometimes, and only a few times at that, he had seen stories of his work appear on a front page, or at least on page two or three. Seeing the stories upset him in a small way. He was proud of his work now, but it was a private thing, not something to be shared and used to titillate others. He had also seen many stories of other people out there engaged in similar work, and he had clipped and saved those stories as research. The stories were different, but the subject matter was always the same.

He looked up from the paper as he flipped the pages to the sports section. Tourists of all types flowed past him—large Canadian families speaking in French, groups of teenaged girls trying to look twenty and women of thirty or older trying to look twenty. The boys and young men were loud, dressed almost in uniform—jeans, sneakers, and T-shirts—and several carried large cassette radios. They were all ignorant of how easy it was. With a car and some luck and a good knife, you could do his type of work one day in New York City, say, and the next day, when the cops were trying to piece together clues and line up witnesses, you could be in Pennsylvania.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The day after that, while the cops were trying to figure out motives, you could be in Maryland, getting ready for another job.

And they were doing it. The dark was full of it. Driving along the side roads late at night, looking for a classical station on the radio, he would feel them out there, doing their work—in Seattle, Los Angeles, Atlanta, New Orleans. He could see them, sometimes almost smell them.

He got up, dropping the folded newspaper on the bench. There was time to waste and he strolled around the strip of shops, letting his mind and the electric impulses move him along. He was getting closer. He went inside a T-shirt store and browsed through the different-colored shirts. The shop was little more than a large room, with the shirts hanging off suspended racks. Rock music boomed from speakers mounted on the walls. The fabric of one of the shirts slipped softly through his fingers as he looked at the woman clerk. She was in her early twenties, with a dark tan and short brown hair. She came from behind the counter to help a fat tourist standing at a rack with his cameras and shopping bags. Her denim miniskirt was molded against her hips and she wore black seamed stockings and high heels. A light-blue T-shirt with a seagull on it was tucked taut and snug into her waist. He listened to her laugh and watched her right leg bounce in time with the music. He stared at her. Was she the one? He closed his eyes and then looked at her again. No. She wasn't.

Outside again, he felt the urge to keep moving. He trusted his urges. Since the accident, they had never been wrong. For a few weeks after he left the newspaper, he had stayed at home, trying to ignore the new feelings and impulses and images that urged him to roam at night. But it was like trying to lie in bed and ignore a fire underneath it.

That first night, he had wandered along aimlessly, the handgun heavy in his coat pocket, until he went down a dark street and saw the flickering movement of a person coming toward him. He had taken the gun out instinctively and pulled the trigger one-two-three-four-five-six, not stopping even when the shadow had screamed and crumpled to the slick asphalt. He had run home and not gone out for a week, not until he had seen the newspaper story that told him who the shadow had been. Then he knew he would do it again.

He paused for a moment among the crowd, noticing a green-and-white police cruiser crawling along next to the sidewalk. Two cops

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the front seat scanned the crowd and he knew better than to walk quickly away or to run. He stood still, watching them go by, praying they wouldn't stop and find an excuse to search him. They would find his weapons, and they would start checking the computer records. And if they found the map, it would be a simple thing to start matching up the red dots with his work. He would certainly go to jail and might even die. He was not about to let that happen. His work was too important.

Inside an open restaurant, he sat on a swivel stool and ordered a pepperoni pizza slice and a Coke. It was when he was munching on the pizza that he spotted the waitress on the other side of the restaurant and knew he had found her. She was blonde and wore her long hair in a French braid. Even though she was wearing a blue-and-white waitress uniform, she stood out. She had a nice figure, but it was her smile that attracted him, the way her eyes shone at the customers, full of life. He saw her glance up at the clock and he knew she would be leaving soon. He smiled in anticipation. The waiting was over. Soon he would be done with this job and he could move on.

Early on during his work, he remembered as he finished his pizza, he had actually had a few regrets, but the time in—was it Indianapolis?—had changed him. Standing in the woman's bedroom, over her still and bloody-sheet-covered form, he had stared in amazement at the photos she had on her wall, displayed like trophies, photos that screamed at him, and since then he had no regrets. He swallowed the last of the Coke. The images and the flashes were coming on stronger. It was like watching a movie preview in a smoky, ill-lit theater. He never saw all of what was going to happen, but he saw enough.

He walked back out to the boardwalk and wandered, listening to the traffic, the people, and the boom of the ocean striking the sand. Then it was time.

He went back to the restaurant and there she was, heading out along the sidewalk, her French braid bouncing with each step. She carried a purse and wore an open cloth jacket. He tailed her. There was a side street up ahead that stretched away from the beach, but she walked past it, even though he knew she would go down that street in a few more minutes. She stopped at an open-counter place that sold coffee and pastries and bought a cup of coffee in a plastic cup from a young guy she smiled at in a different way than she did her customers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He touched the knife in his jeans. Ah, my friend, he thought, looking at the counter man, if only you knew what is waiting here for your sweetheart. She leaned forward and got a quick kiss from the counter man. By the time she turned, he had already slipped down the side street.

The street was like a dark corridor, with only a few weak streetlights. It was narrow and crowded with parked cars. There were no stores or bars, just rows of motel units, garages, and dark cottages. He walked down the middle of the road, his boot heels clicking against the tar surface. Inside, he was trembling so hard he thought his hands would shake. The flashes in his mind were like a strobe now.

He reached the end of the road and circled back, cutting through some back yards, dodging clotheslines and barbecue grills. He crept silently up a dirt driveway until he came back to the street and he crouched behind a pile of bulging garbage bags. He could hear a faroff television set, but the cottages around him seemed empty. Good. No witnesses.

His eyes adjusted to the darkness and he took deep, silent breaths. He tried to ease the tension and again touched the knife in his jeans. It would come out soon enough. The garrote was for backup and he hated to use the pistol, it made so much noise. Besides, he enjoyed the knife.

He saw her approach, her heels making a sharp clicking on the asphalt. He eased the knife out. It felt good in his hand, a comfortable weight. She came closer and he shook his head in wonderment. Why did they always do this? Why did they do such stupid things, like walking alone on a dark and empty street? As she came past only a few feet from him, he saw she was sipping from the coffee container and he stood slowly up, watching her walk on.

Now there was the other shadow, moving up from the opposite side of the street and quickstepping across toward her. He took two fast steps out in the street and was behind the shadow, his forearm around the throat. He kicked the man's legs out from under him and dragged him behind some garbage bags. He knelt over him, one hand on the man's mouth, the other holding his knife, both of his knees digging hard into the man's outstretched wrists.

The waitress had stopped beside a streetlight and looked back. He felt the man convulsing beneath him, trying to get up, and he ignored him, watching the waitress, wishing her home. She shook her head

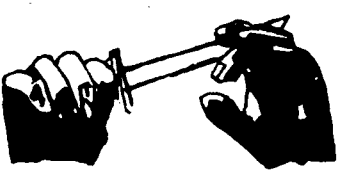
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and kept walking. Good for you, sweetheart, he thought, be safe. Always.

He went back to the man struggling underneath him. Even in the darkness he could tell the man wasn't clean. He smiled in anticipation as he removed his left hand from the mouth and thrust his other hand down hard toward the throat. He sat back quickly on his haunches and listened with satisfaction to the harsh gurgling that eventually faded away to a wheezing. He wiped his knife clean on the man's pants leg and returned it to his jeans, then started the search. In one pocket was a switchblade, in another a woman's nylon stocking. He left both on the man's sticky chest.

The street was clear. He walked back up it and in a few minutes he was mingling with the crowd along the boardwalk. He was happy, with a warm feeling of release. It had gone like all the rest. Some people had strange talents, he thought. Some could multiply large figures in their minds and others made millions in the stock market. He was able to thwart those who preyed on innocent people.

Back at the motel, he would check out shortly. He would make another dot on the map in the car and then start driving. This time he would head south.



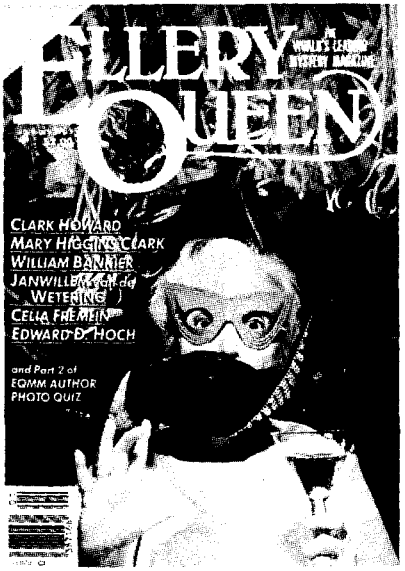
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

QUENCH YOUR THIRST FOR MYSTERY

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO 24% OFF THE COVER PRICE

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-247-2160

(Iowa residents Call 1-800-362-2860)



YES SEND ME 12 ISSUES FOR ONLY $15.97

ELLERY QUEEN THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

P.O. Box 1930, Marion, OH 43306

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue. Outside U.S. and possessions $19.97 for 12 issues. All foreign orders must be paid in advance in U.S. currency.

DQB6Q

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

A painful reminiscence by Northmont's respected retired general practitioner—as clever and evocative a case as we have come to expect from this highly favored series by the prodigious Mr. Hoch . . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE UNFINISHED PAINTING

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"You're early," old Dr. Sam Hawthorne said, holding open the door. "I suppose you're anxious to hear about the time I almost left Northmont. Let me pour us a little brandy to keep out the cold and I'll tell you about it. It wasn't one of my prouder moments, but the story of my years as a country doctor wouldn't be complete without including it."

It happened in the early autumn of '32 (Dr. Sam went on), during the worst of the Depression and the growing excitement of the presidential campaign. Of course, people were talking about what would happen if Roosevelt won the election and there was much speculation about the end of Prohibition being near since both major candidates had called for its repeal. But on the day this began I wasn't thinking about politics or Prohibition. I was at Pilgrim Memorial Hospital attending to a little boy named Tommy Forest, who had contracted a bad case of polio during the late summer and had just taken a turn for the worse.

"He needs help in breathing," I told his parents, Mavis and Mike

© *1985 by Edward D. Hoch.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Forest. They'd moved to Northmont the previous summer and he was now teaching at our new elementary school.

Mavis was a lovely young woman and it almost tore my heart out when she asked me, "Will he be paralyzed, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid there might be some lingering paralysis," I told her honestly, "but it's too soon to tell how extensive it could be. Right now we're fighting to save his life."

"What can be done for him?" Mike asked, anguish in his face.

"Tommy's respiratory nerves are being destroyed by the poliomyelitis. It's very difficult for him to breathe by himself and it may soon become impossible. There's been success recently with a device called a Drinker respirator—or iron lung. It was invented four years ago by a man named Slaw Drinker. It's a large pressure tank that encloses the entire body except for the head. A motor increases and decreases the air pressure, causing air to move in and out of the patient's lungs."

"Could it help Tommy?"

"It's the only thing I know that might save his life now. They have one in Stamford, but I don't know if it's in use. I'll phone the hospital there."

The doctor in Stamford told me their machine was out of service while they repaired the motor. "Maybe it'll be available by tomorrow," he said, sounding dubious. "Try calling me in the morning, before noon."

"Tomorrow might be too late for my patient. Do you know of any other Drinker respirators in the area?"

"They have one in Boston." He gave me the name of the hospital and I thanked him.

It took me only ten minutes to learn that Boston's sole iron lung was in use, keeping alive a girl only a few years older than Tommy. I put in a call to my nurse April and asked her to try the largest hospital in New York City. "Where will you be if I need to reach you?" she asked.

"I have to finish my hospital rounds. There's still Mrs. Decker and Major Fox to see." The previous year, an unused wing of the hospital had been converted to doctors' offices. It was much more convenient to have my office there than in town, especially since more and more of my patients were entering the hospital for treatment. And the days when most people entered and departed this world at home were fast fading. More than half of Northmont births were at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hospital now, and many terminally ill patients were treated there, too.

Mrs. Decker and Major Fox were typical examples of my practice. She had given birth the previous day to a plump baby boy. He was an aging war veteran whose lungs had been ruined by a German mustard-gas attack in 1918. There was little any doctor could do for him. I poked my head in to say a few words to Mrs. Decker and her proud husband, thinking as I did so of Mr. and Mrs. Forest down the hall with their terribly ill child. The Deckers would be taking their baby home in a few days to start a new life. For the Forests, whatever the outcome, life would never be the same.

Major Fox had always been a tough old bird and I hated to see him suffer. He lay propped up in bed, a man in his mid-sixties who appeared much older. There was a visitor when I arrived—Clint Wainwright, president of the Northmont Merchants' Council. Major Fox's sporting-goods store on Main Street had always been a popular meeting place, especially during the hunting season, and the major had stimulated business for other merchants with a number of small but useful inventions—a gadget to open cans, another to prolong the life of lightbulbs. He'd even developed some small amplifiers to help the hard-of-hearing.

"How's the patient today?" I asked with a smile, glancing at the chart at the foot of his bed.

"Awful tired, Doc," he managed to say.

"I told him we need him back on Main Street," Wainwright said, trying to be cheerful. He was an ambitious man in his late thirties, a haberdasher by trade. His wavy hair made people kid him about resembling a movie star.

"He'll be back soon enough," I said, sounding more hopeful than I felt.

Major Fox coughed and tried to shift to a more comfortable position. "I don't know, Doc. I think that German gas is finally going to finish me off."

I checked his vital signs, taking his pulse and blood pressure and listening to his heart. He was no better than the previous day, but no worse, either. It was almost noon when I finished, and we could hear the nurses bringing around the lunch trays for the patients. "I'd better be going," Clint Wainwright said, getting to his feet. "Take care of yourself now, Major. If you're still here on the weekend I'll stop out to see you again."

"Thanks for coming, Clint," Major Fox replied. As the nurse en-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tered, he started coughing again and she set down his tray and went to adjust the pillows behind his head.

Wainwright and I walked down the corridor together. "What are his chances?" he asked frankly.

I shrugged. "He'll never recover fully. Whether or not he pulls through this attack remains to be seen."

"I feel sorry for him, without a family or anything."

"Who's taking care of his store?"

"He's got a young chap named Bill Bringham who works there as a clerk. Do you know him?"

I shook my head. "The town's growing so fast I can't keep up with all the new arrivals."

"I haven't seen you around the clothing store lately, Doc. We're having a clearance sale right now."

"Thanks, Clint. I might drop by."

I left him in the lobby and went down the corridor to my office. April handed me some messages and said, "I checked with New York. The only two iron lungs I've located are both in use. Do you want me to try some cities farther away?"

I shook my head. "He'd never make the trip. We'll have to hope he hangs on long enough for the Stamford unit to be repaired. That's our best bet."

April went to lunch and I finished up some paperwork before starting my house calls. I'd promised to look in on Mrs. Higgins and see how her gout was coming along. Before I could leave, however, there was a phone call from Sheriff Lens. "Doc, I need your help."

"I was just leaving on some calls, Sheriff."

"Tess Wainwright's been murdered. I'm at the Wainwright house now."

"Tess? I can't believe it! I saw her husband at the hospital not an hour ago."

"I need you here, Doc. Can you come right out?"

"I could stop on my way to the Higgins place," I told him.

By the time I arrived, Clint Wainwright was on the scene, summoned from his store. He was nearly prostrate with grief and I did my best to comfort him before joining Sheriff Lens.

He stood in Tess's small studio overlooking the wooded back yard of the house. She was slumped in a chair at the easel where she painted. A long paint-spattered cloth had been knotted around her throat. There were signs that she'd tried to struggle—an overturned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vase holding flowers, a broken fingernail on one hand—but death appeared to have come with a swift finality.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Tess liked to do her painting in here," the sheriff replied, indicating the easel with a half finished watercolor of the vase of mums. "Clint left her a little before eleven, just as Mrs. Babcock, the cleaning woman, arrived. Mrs. Babcock was working out in the living room the whole time. The studio door was closed. She swears nobody entered the room, yet you can see for yourself that all the windows are locked."

I moved to each of the three windows in turn. All were firmly latched on the inside, and there was no other door. "There are at least two obvious explanations, of course," I said. "Either Clint killed his wife before he left or Mrs. Babcock is lying."

"She claims she heard Tess moving around—turning on the radio, answering the phone—after her husband left. And I guess I believe her, Doc. That's why I called you."

I'd known Mrs. Babcock for a few years, mainly through running into her at my patients' homes. She was a woman in her early fifties, sturdy and reliable, with a reputation as a hard worker. Widowed for the past ten years, she'd taken a number of weekly cleaning jobs to help support herself and her teenaged daughter.

"Tell me everything that happened from the time you arrived," I said.

Mrs. Babcock's eyes were red from crying, but she seemed to have pulled herself together following the gruesome discovery. "I arrived about ten minutes to eleven, like I always do on Wednesdays. Mr. Wainwright said his wife was painting in her studio and I started cleaning the living room here, right outside the door. He went to the basement to bring up a spare tire for his car and I heard her turn the radio on, as she often did when she painted. I went about my business. About twenty minutes after Mr. Wainwright left, the phone rang and she answered on the first ring."

"Could you hear who she was talking to?"

"No, the door's too thick to carry voices. I just heard it ring once. Then there was nothing else until just before noon." Mrs. Babcock clenched her handkerchief. "I knocked on the door to ask her if she wanted lunch. The radio was still playing, so I figured she didn't hear the knock. I opened the door to ask her again and I found her like that."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I lifted my eyes to Sheriff Lens, who was standing behind her. "Was the radio on when you arrived, Sheriff?"

"No."

"I turned it off when I called him. It was right by the phone."

"And you didn't actually see Tess Wainwright alive before then?"

"Well, no."

"And you heard no sounds of a struggle?"

"No, but the radio was pretty loud."

"You touched nothing in the room except the radio and the telephone?"

"Nothing."

"And you'll swear no one entered the room while you were out here?"

"No one."

Sheriff Lens sighed. "You see how difficult you're making it for yourself, don't you, Mrs. Babcock?"

"I'm only telling the truth."

We left her and went to the kitchen to speak with Clint Wainwright. He stood up as we approached, his face reflecting more anger than grief. "Who could have done it?"

"That's what I was going to ask you," the sheriff told him.

"Clint," I said, "was Tess expecting any visitors this morning?"

"Not that I know of."

"What time did you leave her?"

"It must have been around quarter to eleven. I went downstairs and got a tire I wanted repaired and dropped it at the garage. Then I went to the hospital to see Major Fox. I reached his room a little after eleven."

"You weren't at your store this morning?"

"No. I have a young woman who handles things when I'm away."

"Did Tess have any enemies you know of?"

"Everyone loved her."

"Was there ever any sort of trouble between her and Mrs. Babcock? Did she ever catch her stealing, for example?"

"No. There's been nothing like that."

Some neighbors arrived, attracted by the sheriff's car out front. One of them was Bill Bringham. I remembered the name. "You're the young fellow who works at Major Fox's sporting-goods store, aren't you?"

"That's right, sir," he answered politely. He was a handsome,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

muscular young man in his mid-twenties, barely a decade younger than me, but the thick glasses he wore made him appear a bit older.

"You live around here?"

"Across the street, a few houses down."

"Did you happen to be home a little before noon?"

"No, sir. I was at the store. How's the Major coming along?"

"As well as can be expected."

"I hope he'll be better soon."

Major Fox would never be much better, but I didn't tell him that. I asked, "Have you ever noticed any visitors to this house during the day when you were at home?"

The sheriff and the others were out of earshot and he looked at me shyly. "Boy friends, you mean? While her husband was at the clothing store?"

"I didn't mean that, necessarily."

"No, I never noticed anyone. Except Mrs. Babcock, of course. She came every Wednesday."

The body had been removed when I returned to the studio. I glanced at the telephone and the overturned vase of flowers, then turned my attention to the unfinished painting. The vase and flowers had been sketched in, and some of the watercolors—bold strokes of red and green—applied to the leaves and petals.

Sheriff Lens joined me with another of the neighbors. "Doc, you remember Heidi Miller, don't you?"

She was a pleasant woman of about Tess Wainwright's age. I'd treated her two children for the usual round of preadolescent illnesses. "How are you, Heidi? I'd forgotten you live on this street."

"I was over to visit Tess last night. I can't believe this could happen in this neighborhood." She brushed hair away from her eyes, looking distraught.

"You saw her last night?" I asked with interest. "Was her husband here?"

"Clint? Yes—he was going over the store's books. I said hello, but I'd come to see Tess. We were in here, talking about her paintings."

I motioned toward the easel. "She was working on this still life?"

"The flowers, yes. I see she added some color to it since last night."

"You were close to her, Heidi. Did she ever hint that her life might be in danger?"

"No."

"What did you talk about last night?" Sheriff Lens asked.

"Her painting, my children. She was always interested in my boys,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

probably because she had no children of her own. We visited each other often. I can't believe she's gone."

"Do you employ Mrs. Babcock, too?" I asked on a hunch.

"Yes. She does my house on Tuesdays."

"Is she trustworthy?"

"Oh, yes."

"You've never had any problems with her?"

"Never."

There was little more to be done and I walked out to my car with Sheriff Lens. "Do *you* have any idea who might have called her between eleven and twelve?"

The sheriff shrugged. "Maybe we should talk to Milly Tucker at the exchange. She might remember who she plugged in."

"I'll let you handle that. I've got patients waiting."

"I sure would appreciate any help you can give me, Doc. Clint Wainwright's an important man with the local merchants. I gotta solve this one real quick."

I paused by the car. "I can't help thinking about Clint's perfect alibi. If we believe Mrs. Babcock, at the time Tess was being murdered he was sitting in that hospital room with Major Fox. I saw him there myself. I'm always suspicious of perfect alibis."

"You think Clint hired someone to strangle his wife?" Sheriff Lens asked, his tone of voice reflecting his doubts.

"I don't know. That wouldn't solve the problem of Mrs. Babcock swearing no one entered the room, would it?"

The sheriff shook his head. "Could you talk to Milly at the telephone exchange for me? I want to get the autopsy started as soon as possible."

I agreed with reluctance. I was already late for my house call on Mrs. Higgins, but her condition was nothing serious. I could always drive over in the morning.

Wainwright's Haberdashery was only a block from the telephone building and I decided to stop there first. I remembered the young woman Clint Wainwright had mentioned. Lottie Gross was an attractive brunette who'd been popular with the boys ever since high school.

"Dr. Sam," she greeted me. "Mr. Wainwright's not here now. You probably heard the awful news about his wife."

"I just came from there. It's a terrible tragedy."

"They were so close. He'll take it awfully hard."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Was he in the store at all this morning, Lottie?"

"No, I think he went right to the hospital from home, to visit Major Fox. I opened at ten and he got here a little after twelve, just before the sheriff phoned him."

"Thanks, Lottie," I said. "I'll be seeing you."

I went down the block to the telephone exchange and climbed the stairs to the second floor where Milly Tucker and another girl worked the switchboards. Both had been out of high school only a few years. Milly was a wild young woman who'd been born a little too late to be a flapper, but she had the reputation of livening up a party with her rendition of the Charleston.

"Hello, Milly. How are you today?"

"Dr. Hawthorne! What are you doing up here?"

The other operator shoved a plug into a lighted hole and spoke the familiar request. "Number, please."

"You heard what happened to Tess Wainwright this morning?"

"Someone killed her. It's horrible!"

"As near as we can tell, she died between eleven and noon. Mrs. Babcock, the cleaning woman, heard the phone ring once during that time. Is there any chance you could remember who called her?"

"Gee, Dr. Hawthorne, we get so many calls during the day. Rose and I just plug and unplug without paying much attention." Her board was beginning to light up and she made a few quick connections before turning back to me. "I wish I could help you. Rose, do you remember a call to the Wainwright house between eleven and twelve?"

The other girl thought about it. "It seems like there was one. Maybe from Mr. Wainwright at his store?"

I shook my head. "He wasn't at the store."

"I guess I can't remember, then."

"Thanks anyway, girls. If anything comes to you, let me or Sheriff Lens know right away."

When I got to my office, April was frantic. "I've been calling all over trying to find you. Millie Tucker said you just left there. The Forest boy is worse."

"I'll go right out to see him."

"The Stamford hospital called. The respirator is fixed. I told them to send it as fast as possible."

"How long ago was that?"

"Just after one. I tried to reach you at the Higgins place but they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said you never arrived there. Where've you been?" There was something like accusation in her tone.

"Mrs. Wainwright's been murdered. The sheriff needed my help."

"What about Mrs. Higgins? She's wondering when you'll be out to see her."

"Call and tell her tomorrow morning."

I hurried down the hospital corridor to Tommy Forest's room. When I reached it I saw a staff doctor and a nurse at his bedside with Tommy's parents. The doctor glanced up as I entered. "I've got a respirator on the way from Stamford," I said.

He shook his head slightly. "I'm sorry, Sam. We couldn't keep him going. He died a few minutes ago."

Mavis Forest turned toward me from the bed. "Where were you? Tommy was crying for you to help him."

"I'm sure Dr. Cranston here did everything he could."

"If the respirator had gotten here in time—" Tears were running down Mike Forest's cheeks.

"I'm sorry." It was all I could say.

Cranston followed me out of the room. "April couldn't reach you anywhere."

"I was helping Sheriff Lens with something."

His lips tightened into a grim line. "Excuse me for saying it, Sam, but our job is to treat the living. We're not policemen."

"There was nothing I could have done."

"You could have been here."

April found me in the office, my hand on the telephone. "Tommy Forest died," I told her.

"I know."

"I just called Stamford to cancel the respirator."

She came over to the desk. "Why don't you go home? You look terrible."

"Cranston says I should have been with my patient instead of out helping Sheriff Lens."

"Don't pay any attention to him."

"He might be right."

I went home to my apartment and brooded. Sheriff Lens phoned once to talk about the case, but I told him I wasn't in a talking mood. The killing of Tess Wainwright had all but passed from my mind. I was thinking instead of Tommy Forest and Mrs. Higgins and the rest of my patients.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Had I let them down?
Did I deserve to be a doctor in Northmont?

I slept very little that night, weighing my future. Solving the mysteries that Sheriff Lens brought me had become an important part of my life, but if I was to remain in Northmont that could no longer be. I was a doctor first. It was time to get my priorities straight, even if it meant leaving Northmont and setting up a new practice in another town.

In the morning I made my hospital rounds, avoiding the empty room where Tommy Forest had been. Major Fox was feeling a little better and I sat with him longer than usual, listening to him reminisce about the war. It was there Sheriff Lens found me. "I been lookin' all over for you, Doc."

I said goodbye to the major and stepped into the hall. "I'm thinking of retiring from the crime-solving business, Sheriff."

"What?"

"A boy died of polio yesterday. I couldn't have saved him by being here, but it might have been some comfort to him and his family."

"What about the people whose lives you save by bringin' killers to justice?"

"We don't get too many repeat offenders around here."

"What about the Wainwright case? Suppose the killer goes free and strangles someone else?"

"I think Tess Wainwright knew her killer. Otherwise he couldn't have gotten behind her to strangle her so easily. You don't turn your back on a burglar."

"How'd he get into the room?"

"Maybe he was there all the time. Maybe Tess had a lover she let in after her husband departed. She could have opened the window for him and relatched it after he entered."

"How'd he get out again?"

"He was still there, hiding behind the door, when Mrs. Babcock entered. He slipped out while she was phoning you."

"I suppose it's a possibility," the sheriff conceded, sounding doubtful. "But wouldn't he have slugged Mrs. Babcock over the head as she entered rather than risk being seen?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Sheriff. I have to make a house call. On the way back, I'll meet you at the Wainwright house and we'll see if my theory could work."

"Can you make it in an hour? Around noon?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'll try."

I called on Mrs. Decker and her baby, who were doing fine, and then drove out to the Higgins house. They were pleasant enough to me, though Mrs. Higgins did say, "We expected you yesterday. I baked a cake and you could have had a piece."

"I'm sorry I missed that. Something came up."

"Milly Tucker says you're helping the sheriff with the Wainwright killing."

"I was, but I'm too busy with patients to give much more time to it."

When I left, I drove immediately to the Wainwright house. Sheriff Lens was waiting outside.

"Find anything interesting?" I asked.

"Just that your theory wouldn't work, Doc. Come take a look."

I followed him into the house, which was silent now and strangely lifeless. "She's being waked this afternoon," the sheriff explained. "Everyone's at the funeral parlor."

We entered the studio off the living room and I saw at once what he meant. The door opened inward to the right, and the telephone was on a table by the right-hand wall. Mrs. Babcock had to go that way to phone for help after finding the body. Even more fatal to my theory, a stack of finished paintings was stored behind the door, leaning against the wall. No one could have hidden there—and even if they'd tried, Mrs. Babcock would have spotted them when she made her call. "I'm convinced," I said.

"Any other ideas, Doc?"

"Not a one." I flipped through the unframed canvases. "She seemed to prefer flowers and still life. Look at the delicate strokes on those petals and leaves. She was a good artist."

"If you say so. I like more action in my pictures."

I started for the door. "I have patients to see."

"Doc, you know who killed her, don't you?"

"There's one possibility," I admitted. "Let's drive over to the funeral parlor."

I followed him in my car and left it parked down the road. Though it wasn't quite time for visiting hours, a crowd had already gathered. We said hello to several people as I searched for the person I wanted. It was a long shot, I knew—a bluff—but it might pay off. "There she is," I said to Sheriff Lens. "Come on."

"Hell, Doc, she can't be the killer! That's—"

"Lottie!" I called out. "Lottie Gross! Could I see you for a minute?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The girl from Wainwright's clothing store came over to us, looking puzzled. "Could you get in the car for a minute, Lottie? We have to speak with you."

"What about?" she asked, getting into the back seat while I held the door.

I slipped into the front seat with the sheriff and half turned to face her. "Lottie, Clint asked you to phone his house yesterday, didn't he? Between eleven and twelve? He asked you to let the phone ring once and then hang up."

"I—"

"Sheriff Lens is about to arrest Clint Wainwright for the murder of his wife. Unless you cooperate with him, you could be charged as an accessory."

Lottie Gross cried a great deal. The sheriff finally drove us down the road where we could talk without fear of interruption. What came through the tears was an overriding fear that her parents would discover she was having an affair with Wainwright. This seemed to her a far greater sin and disgrace than the fact that she'd played a role in helping Wainwright establish an alibi for his wife's murder.

"He never said he was going to kill her," she insisted. "He just asked me to make the phone call."

Sheriff Lens was still in the dark, though he was doing a good job of pretending to know all about it. Finally he asked me, "Could you run over it for Lottie from the beginning, Doc? Maybe then she'll see how serious it is."

"Wainwright strangled his wife in her studio shortly before Mrs. Babcock arrived at quarter or ten to eleven. He closed the door, knowing Mrs. Babcock wouldn't disturb her at least until noon. To heighten the illusion that Tess was still alive, he did two things. He went to the basement on the pretext of picking up a tire to be repaired, and while he was down there he replaced a fuse he'd removed earlier from the fuse box. That caused the radio in Tess's studio to start playing, because he'd turned it on before he left the room earlier. Mrs. Babcock naturally assumed she was alive and had turned on the radio herself. Later, while he was establishing his hospital alibi by visiting Major Fox, he had Lottie here phone his house and let it ring just once, further heightening the illusion that Tess was alive and talking to someone."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How did you know all this, Doc? How do you know Tess wasn't alive?"

"Mrs. Babcock told us she turned off the radio to call you because it was so loud. Are we to believe Tess would have answered the phone when it rang without either turning the radio down or off?"

"I thought Mrs. Babcock said she heard her moving around."

"That part was simply her imagination. If the door was too thick to hear voices, she couldn't have heard any slight movements, either."

Lottie Gross lifted her head.

"He said he'd marry me. I love him."

"You'll have to testify against him if you want to avoid a prison term," I warned her.

"Doc," the sheriff asked me, "how'd you stumble onto this?"

"It was that unfinished painting, I suppose. Those broad strokes of red and green were so unlike the delicate strokes on the petals and leaves of her other paintings. Of course, artists do change their styles, but Heidi Miller visited her the night before and saw the work before those unusual strokes were added. If Tess died earlier than we supposed, without having time for her painting, it would be obvious that her husband's alibi was no good. That got me thinking how the whole thing could have been faked. Rose at the telephone exchange thought the mysterious call was Clint calling home from his store. Her memory was half right in that the call was from the store. I knew it couldn't have been Clint and guessed he'd asked Lottie to place the call and then hang up."

"One thing I still don't understand," Sheriff Lens said. "Why did Clint make it difficult for himself by inventing a closed-room situation? Why didn't he leave a window unlocked, at least, to give a random killer access to the studio?"

"The answer to that is simple. Clint couldn't know that Mrs. Babcock would remain within sight of that door for all that time. He thought she'd be moving around the house, going to other rooms, allowing plenty of opportunity for a hypothetical killer to strike. Mrs. Babcock made the killing into an impossible crime by her movements—or lack of movements."

"Do you want to dictate a statement to me and then sign it?" Sheriff Lens asked Lottie.

"I don't want to hurt Clint."

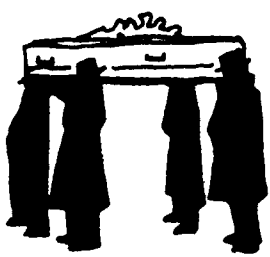
"He killed his wife, Lottie. He has to be punished."

"Yes," she said finally. "I'll sign a statement."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Clint Wainwright was arrested later that afternoon. Two days later Tess was buried. I missed the funeral because Tommy Forest was buried the same morning and I went there instead.

"As it turned out," Dr. Sam concluded, "I stuck pretty well to my promise to devote more time to my patients. I stayed away from playing detective for more than a year. It wasn't until the night Prohibition ended that something happened in Northmont to make me break my vow. But I'll save that story for next time."



DETECTIVERSE

FOR MEDICINAL PURPOSES?

by JOHN ABBOTT

Said the good doctor Sam,
"I confess that I am
Not a fan of Miss Carrie Nation—
I bring help to the sick,
Solve a murderer's trick,
Then enjoy a small, ah, libation."

© 1985 by John Abbott.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anniversary **25th** *Edition*

ENJOY 22 EXCITING STORIES IN

ELLERY QUEEN'S *LATEST ANTHOLOGY*

More LOST LADIES and MEN

This companion volume to the earlier ELLERY QUEEN Anthologies LOST MEN and LOST LADIES, focuses on wicked, wayward, wonderful women and men who are missing or worse. Order your copy today for just $4.50.

☐ **YES!** *Please rush my copy of Ellery Queen's MORE LOST LADIES AND MEN. I have enclosed my check or money order for $4.50.*

Mail to: Ellery Queen Anthologies
P.O. Box 999 Ridgefield, NJ 07657

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE_____ ZIP_____

DQB6X

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery. Available only in the U.S.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Fredric Brown (1906–1972) was perhaps better known in his lifetime for his science fiction, but he first began to write for the detective pulps in 1938. He specialized in quirky plots, and in our field his output includes 22 novels and dozens of short stories. While those novels are now mostly out of print, his short crime fiction, especially that previously uncollected, has recently been attracting attention.

The latest collection is *Carnival of Crime: The Best Mystery Stories of Fredric Brown* (Southern Illinois University Press, $22.95), edited by Francis M. Nevins, Jr., and Martin H. Greenberg. Here are 23 stories, ranging from 5 lines to 55 pages, all a joy to read and well illustrating the power of Brown's imagination and the expressiveness of his prose. Bill Pronzini provides a valuable introduction, and Nevins adds a detailed, comprehensive checklist of all Brown's fiction.

The prolific Elizabeth Linington offers one novel in each of her long-running pseudonymous series. As Dell Shannon, she has *Chaos of Crime* (Morrow, $14.95), the 36th about Luis Mendoza and the Los Angeles Police Department. As Lesley Egan her *Chain of Violence* (Doubleday, $12.95) is the 14th about Vic Varallo of the Glendale Police Department. These have interchangeable plots and nearly interchangeable characters. Linington keeps the narratives aboil with robberies, murders, and other illustrations of the frailties of the human species, rather like a fleshed-out police blotter. And she gives enough attention to the characters—cops, criminals, and innocents caught in between—to maintain interest. Quite readable procedurals, these. One further note: those with a passion for the politically conservative Linington opus should know about "Linington Lineup," a quarterly newsletter edited and published by Rinehart Potts (1223 Glen Terrace, Glassboro, NJ 08028; $12/year).

Death in the Old Country (Scribners, $12.95) is, by my reckoning, the best of Eric Wright's good series about Toronto's Inspector Charlie Salter. Charlie and his wife are trying to renew their shaky marriage by means of a tour of rural England. Quite expectedly, murder occurs in their path; the victim is the owner of the inn at which they're staying. The local copper thinks Salter is a colonial bumpkin; Charlie, though exhibiting bumpkin traits at every opportunity, is determined to name the killer first. Most agreeable.

Another stylish, witty case for Professor Neil Kelly is S. F. X. Dean's *Death and the Mad Heroine* (Walker, $13.95). Here Kelly returns to the Massachusetts campus

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from which the unexpected financial success of his scholarly treatise liberated him a year before. A penniless Welshman has been substituting for him and then writing hundreds of letters of application as his end times neared. The Welshman's wife, a local product, has conceived the passionate notion of writing a book about her father, who disappeared earlier to avoid prosecution for assault on a campus football hero, now a college instructor. In addition, a town chemical firm is happily polluting the ground water with apparent impunity, though the gnashing of campus teeth can be heard. Emotions thus run high in many breasts, and turning over rocks at this late date could be imprudent. The small town academic scene and its denizens are beautifully rendered.

Robert Barnard forsakes his usually satiric voice for a more sober tale of a vanished past in *Out of the Blackout* (Scribners, $12.95). Simon Thorn, a five-year-old, turns up unexpectedly among a group of children evacuated from WWII London. No one claims him, so a childless couple raises him with great love and joy. Some 20 years later, with the aid of flashbacks and fragments of memory, Simon begins to explore his roots, identifying what he believes to be the family from which he sprang. These people, masterfully illuminated in all dimensions by the author, are an unlovely lot, including—it would appear—a murderer. Fascinating storytelling.

Ross H. Spencer introduces another Chicago private eye, seldom sober Buzz Deckard, in *The Missing Bishop* (Mysterious Press, $15.95). It's 1969, and Deckard operates primarily out of Casey's Caboose, a dilapidated watering hole whose owner commits mayhem on anyone bringing rock music into the place. Buzz gets involved in the affairs of Harry Bishop, who first hires Deckard, then disappears, then becomes wanted by the police, by Buzz, and by a bloodthirsty playwright. If this sounds bizarre, it is—as usual with Spencer—and the characters and their language are just as outré as the plot. Missing ladies also figure largely in the matter, and Spencer somehow makes it all come out in satisfying fashion. This is, I think, his strongest story.

Grantham University in Ohio has an unmourned murder victim and a badly rattled English department in *Monkey Puzzle* by Paula Gosling (Doubleday, $12.95). Professor Adamson was a devoutly destructive person, and Lieutenant Jack Stryker has no shortage of suspects; in fact, fellow faculty members tell enough lies to cast suspicion quite effectively on everyone in sight. For some of them, with memories of campus protests of yore, cops are unthinking, unfeeling pigs. Stryker is not encouraged by all this. And, as winter storms come and go, and as Stryker's mind is distracted by his heart, Jack follows an increasingly bloody trail. This is very well done, with excellent color and atmosphere; I only wish Doubleday had not used a submicroscopic typeface.

Bloodletting in copious quan-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tities besets an advertising agency in *Rough Cut* (St. Martin's, $11.95), the debut of Iowa advertising-agency owner Edward Gorman. Michael Ketchum is part owner of Harris-Ketchum Advertising, a firm near Chicago which is falling apart in Michael's hands. Sexual infidelity is endemic, trust is unknown, hidden agendas and suspicions abound. The appearance of a corpse seems reasonable under these circumstances, and a bewildered Ketchum finds himself both suspect and sleuth. An industrious killer—motive unclear—is decimating the agency: what possibly connects the dead, and how did Ketchum get on the killer's list? Enjoyable suspense for carnage lovers.

Reprinters continue to be gratifyingly active, giving me much to recommend. Dodd Mead is issuing a new uniform set of Agatha Christie in hardcovers: *Death on the Nile, The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, The Witness for the Prosecution and Other Stories, Murder on the Orient Express,* and *And Then There Were None* are out ($12.95 each).

In paperback we have *Unhallowed Murder* and *Dead of a Counterplot* by Simon Nash (Perennial, $3.50 each); *The Mystery of the Cape Cod Tavern* and *The Cape Cod Mystery* by Phoebe Atwood Taylor, 1930s Asey Mayo novels (Foul Play Press, $4.50 each); spying with Dr. Jason Love in *Passport to Oblivion* and *Passport to Peril* by James Leasor, and espionage with Tommy Hambledon in *Without Lawful Authority* by Manning Coles (Leete's Island Books, $5.95 each); *Rose's Last Summer, Ask for Me Tomorrow, Banshee,* and *An Air That Kills* by Margaret Millar (International Polygonics, $4.95 each); *The Casino Murder Case* by S. S. Van Dine plus *The Sands of Windee* and *The Mountains Have a Secret* by Arthur W. Upfield (Scribners, $3.95 each); *Your Turn, Mr. Moto* and *Thank You, Mr. Moto* by John P. Marquand (Little, Brown, $3.95 each); *Cat and Mouse* by Christianna Brand (International Polygonics, $4.95); *Flight into Darkness* and *The Dark River* by Philip Clark (Perennial, $3.50 each); *Death Turns the Tables, The Sleeping Sphinx,* and *Till Death Do Us Part,* all 1940s Gideon Fell mysteries by John Dickson Carr (International Polygonics, $4.95 each); *Nothing More Than Murder, Recoil,* and *The Grifters* by Jim Thompson (Black Lizard, $3.95 each); and, finally, early Lawrence Block novels, *The Specialists* and *The Girl with the Long Green Heart* (Foul Play, $3.95 each).

© *1985 by Allen J. Hubin.*

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

"It's a sad story."

"Another drink, then." Thorpe nodded at the bartender, who was intrigued by the speed of this encounter between two of his customers.

"My husband Drake has to be the most understanding man in the world. One of life's heroes, a gentleman pure and true."

"Too good to go on living."

"Don't say that." She frowned, then smiled and brushed her lips over the back of his hand . . .

VERONICA'S HUSBAND

by WILLIAM BANKIER

The woman floated into the Carousel Showbar at half past nine, throwing a salute to the band. She settled onto a stool and gave the bartender a smile that crossed the room to where Thorpe was sitting behind a glass of his company's best bourbon and lodged itself in his heart. The keyboards player waved at her and came alive on stage. He began strutting behind his instrument, putting in more runs.

Thorpe had logged one of his better days over at the distiller's head office on Ste. Catherine Street. Sales figures for the previous quarter had landed on his desk and they looked good. Any day now, the Old Man would call him in and the directorship would be on the agenda. Thorpe craved promotion, the only negative being if they should insist he import Mildred from down home in Kentucky. Company policy was strict on the subject of marital convention. Zenith Distillers wanted every executive to have his wife in residence, pref-

© *1985 by William Bankier.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

erably in a floor-length gown with a cheerful grin on her face and a platter of miniature creamed-mushroom vol-au-vents on the table.

Thorpe wanted the big car and the stock options, but living here in Montreal with the childhood sweetheart who had become his wife was going to represent a heavy penalty. Still, it had been a delightful year, breaking in the new city while confining his contact with Millie to letters, telephone calls, and the occasional trip home.

The girl at the bar lifted her glass in a theatrical way and Thorpe's heartbeat quickened as he realized she was drinking to him. His choice was to grin like an idiot or to go and join her. He carried his drink between tables and occupied the stool beside her. When he squeezed his long legs against the bar, one of his knees touched her thigh.

"You, sir," she said in a husky voice, "are the most interesting man in the place."

"Does that include our friend on the electric piano?" Thorpe liked her face. From a distance, she had looked the breezy beach-girl, tanned and gleaming with bleached hair cut short and teased into studied disarray. Up close, he saw enough lines around the blue eyes to indicate experience. She had to be in her early thirties.

"Are you talking about Elvin?" She laughed and pointed at the boy on stage. "That's my little brother, Elvin Patch. Isn't he a charmer? I came all the way from Milford-on-Cayuga—that's in Upstate New York—to bring him some money my husband owed him."

"Good girl. You mentioned husband within the first minute. I'm married, too. And now we know where we're at."

"Not quite you don't. I have a unique situation."

"How so?"

"Because my husband is a very special man." She drank what looked like gin and tonic. "I'm Veronica Hazlitt."

He shook her hand, allowed their hands to turn and grip again so that, drawing closer, they sat almost head to head, elbows on the bar as if they were about to arm-wrestle. "Tell me about this special husband."

"It's a sad story."

"Another drink, then." He nodded at the bartender, who was intrigued by the speed of this encounter between two of his customers.

"My husband Drake has to be the most understanding man in the world. One of life's heroes, a gentleman pure and true."

"Too good to go on living."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't say that." She frowned, then smiled and brushed her lips over the back of his hand. "You don't know what happened. It was seven years ago, in Milford. It's a very small place. Drake and I had been engaged for a long time, we were about to be married. Then there was a terrible fire in his cottage. A propane gas cylinder exploded. He suffered awful, disfiguring burns, all his hair gone, his face like one of those wartime pilots they only show you for a couple of seconds on television."

"Good Lord."

"When he recovered, as much as he could, Drake said I was no longer obligated to marry him. He set me free." Veronica smiled to herself as she looked back on the perfection of that tragic time. "But I saw to it that the wedding took place. I wore white. Drake was splendid in his wheelchair, speaking the service as best he could."

"I think you're the one who was noble," Thorpe said. "You committed yourself to a tough union."

"But that's the glory of Drake's generosity," she said. "He agreed to accept me as his wife only if I would seek romance in my life. Not in Milford—it's too small. People would talk and he would be humiliated. I was to travel, spend time in other cities, meet men. Drake wants me to use my beauty for a happy life." Her eyes met those of the older man facing her in the dim light of the nightclub with the band playing an electronic blues. "But I always tell the truth about my brave husband, I never forget him."

As they finished their drinks, Thorpe asked her if she was hungry and she admitted she could handle a steak. On the way out of the club, he said, "What about your brother?"

"Little Elvin Patch," she said, "can manage on his own."

They ate a good meal at the Danube and then she drove home with him as if they had been dating for years. "You've got a nice place," she said, prowling the furnished apartment Thorpe rented in a high-rise building on upper Stanley Street. "But your wife hasn't done much with it."

"My wife has never seen it. She's in a small town outside Louisville, Kentucky. Not even as big as Milford-on-Cayuga."

"Are you two splitting?"

"No. I worked for a Zenith subsidiary in Kentucky. When I was promoted to the head office, Millie agreed I should come up and get the lay of the land. I expect I'll be sending for her soon."

"Millie," Veronica said into the cold, polished silence. "Mildred." Then she snapped off her earrings and came to Thorpe sideways,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like a cat, insinuating herself against him. "Speaking of the lay of the land," she said, "how do you like me so far?"

Tucked up in bed with her, Thorpe had some trouble getting started, what with mental images of her disfigured husband a few hundred miles away cheering her on, and brother Patch playing his jazz just down the street. But Veronica was enthusiastic, so he relaxed finally and left most of it to her.

In the morning, Thorpe went to work while Veronica slept on. He did well that day, throwing his weight around in a friendly manner. More things got done than the stately old offices had witnessed in weeks. He even poured a drink for his secretary at half past four and when she mentioned a friend arriving from Toronto for a visit he gave her Thursday off. And tickets to Place des Arts for a concert he didn't want to attend anyway.

At six-thirty, alone on the executive floor the way he liked it, an uneasy hunch stirring at the back of his mind made him pick up the phone and dial his home number. She came on the line when he was about to put it down.

"Veronica?"

"Damn it all, you weren't supposed to call. I wanted to surprise you."

"I'm surprised," he said, allowing a bit of his annoyance to come through.

"Never mind, you can pick up some white wine, okay? When can I expect you?"

She could not expect him ever. Thorpe was his own man—he hadn't been back to the apartment on a weeknight before ten o'clock in the past six months. "I'll be about half an hour. The wine I like is a few blocks away."

He forgave her because she had gone to a lot of trouble and was very cute about it. "I only used things that were in the house," she pointed out. "Drink lots of wine, you'll think it's delicious."

It was certainly edible—a macaroni casserole with tinned tuna and green pepper and some sauce she had made from a soup mix. And she had chopped up apples and pears and bananas that were about to turn in the fruit bowl, adding orange juice, brown sugar, and brandy to make a tangy, fragrant dessert. Four glasses of wine put a grin on Thorpe's face.

"Best meal I've had since lunch," he teased her.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You lie like a lilac," she said in a haughty, confident tone. "I know when I've pleased a man."

"So," he said, opening the other bottle of wine, "you've paid your brother the money he was owed by your husband. What's on the agenda now?"

"Transparent, darling."

"Me?"

"If you're wondering how long I'll be staying in town, ask me."

"Okay, how long will you be staying in town?"

"You wouldn't ask me that if we'd ever danced together."

They walked across Dominion Square on a night of mild, leafy bliss and rode the Chateau Champlain elevator to L'Escapade. Here, surrounded by pale-blue windows and the dark-blue night beyond, hemmed in by half visible diners, they danced to a 1930s-style orchestra on a floor too small for anything but close encounters of the erotic kind. When she spoke, her lips brushed his, their feet hardly moving beneath the undulating motions of their bodies. He was practically making love standing up in a crowd and Thorpe was filled with a teenaged sense of immortality.

Hours later, in bed and nearing sleep, he roused himself to reply to her smug question. " 'Jasay?"

"I said how long now do you think I should stay in town?"

Thorpe had never been able to resist a straight-line. Response was easy with so much booze in his stomach and the customary post-coital remorse weighing down his soul. "What time is it now?" he murmured.

For a few days, she kept out of his way. There was the neat pile of her things on the end of the dresser—a lipstick, a comb, a magazine, her sunglasses—so the implication was that she would be back. Thorpe kicked himself mentally for not discovering where she was staying. Probably with her brother, and Patch's telephone number should be available through the Carousel Showbar office but it might be best to let the sleeping dog lie. If she didn't come around before the weekend, he would dump her stuff in the bin. That would put paid to the relationship even if she did come back later.

The thing was, Thorpe mused as he worked at being busy late one afternoon in the executive suite, he was not entirely disenchanted with Veronica. The effect of her was a bit like a strenuous binge—a few days later, remorse worn off, you were ready to tie one on again.

His desk intercom buzzed. "Yes?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Mrs. Hazlitt to see you, sir."

The name escaped him. "Mrs. who?"

The box out front must have been turned up full. He heard Veronica's reaction. "Why, Jerry Thorpe, I'll never forgive you. It's been all of three days."

"Sorry, I'm deep in some projections here. Send Mrs. Hazlitt in."

She entered carrying a large package under her arm. The Holt-Renfrew box made him feel interested but uneasy. It turned out to contain a black single-breasted jacket, mohair, soft and light. She made him try it on. It fit like a glove.

"I got your size from the things in your closet." She was admiring him as if she had designed his body and had it built.

"Veronica, this is a three-hundred-dollar garment," Thorpe said. "What are you doing?"

"Having fun."

He took her to dinner and then to the Showbar to hear her brother play. After half a set, Thorpe pleaded a headache and fled home, insisting she remain in the club. He felt humiliated, going to bed at ten o'clock like a sick man because he was afraid of this woman. And he was angry with her. What was her point? He had a wife in Kentucky and Veronica had a husband in Milford-on-Cayuga. Again he saw the man Hazlitt with his horrible burns, issuing carte-blanche to his nympho wife so she could hustle around on either side of the border and not foul up the domestic nest.

The telephone rang at eleven. "Don't worry about me, I'm in bed. Almost asleep, in fact. No, don't come around. And listen, it isn't good for you to come into the office like that. Zenith is an old-fashioned outfit, they don't like their married execs to have girl friends."

After that, she met him outside, down the street, well away from the entrance to Zenith House. "How's that?" she smirked, taking his arm. "Nobody will ever spot us unless they send out spies to follow you. In which case, you shouldn't be working for them."

Thorpe squired her doggedly down the street and into a bar he never frequented, feeling as if the best days of his life were being stolen from him.

"What's the matter?"

"Hard day, hard day."

"Is it me?"

"I didn't say that."

"No, you're too damn polite." She bit into her drink and switched

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her face away. "All I did was fall in love with you. I'm not supposed to do that. Sorry."

"It isn't the end of the world."

"We live in different worlds."

When their tragic farewell (which Thorpe believed meant "game over") turned out to be no such thing, he made a decision. She had begun leaving telephone messages for him at the office when he stayed away from the apartment or left the receiver there off the hook when he was in. It was clear the girl was crazy or, at the very least, neurotically intense. The best way for him to free himself from an untidy situation was to disappear for a while. He had some holidays coming. He would drive down to Kentucky and see Mildred. By the time he returned, Veronica would have found some new lover and moved on.

Thorpe drove south early on a Saturday morning. Accustomed to Montreal traffic, he was elated by the relatively open highway stretching ahead of him. He stopped for breakfast at a service center near Messina after crossing the bridge into New York State. He was back on the road when it occurred to him that he was entering the Finger Lakes District, that he was only miles from Lake Cayuga. He couldn't have said when he thought of stopping off in Milford to take a look at Drake Hazlitt. But once the idea formed in his mind it became rock-hard, not easily dislodged. He had to meet the man who married Veronica Patch, then turned her loose among an unsuspecting male population.

The town was easy to locate on Thorpe's map but getting there was less than half the fun. After a few passes along secondary roads, he finally took the proper turn and approached Milford-on-Cayuga as the afternoon began to wane. He felt he was driving into the opening sequence of a film about an attack by giant grasshoppers, the producer able to afford only a few fake buildings and hardly any people.

As he reached the end of the main street, with the lake a hundred yards away on his right, Thorpe saw, on a piece of land overlooking the water, the burnt-out ruins of a house. He turned and cruised past it, convinced that he was observing the scene of Drake Hazlitt's tragedy. Seeing the hard evidence in charred timbers and shattered glass, he could now understand Veronica's behavior: look what she was running away from.

Half a mile on, there was a roadhouse with a neon sign that said

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OPE. Thorpe parked on the gravel forecourt, went inside, and sat at the bar. A fat, tanned individual with freckles and mahogany hair came down a flight of stairs and manned the bottles and taps. With a cold beer in front of him, Thorpe opened his questioning.

"That must have been some fire down the road. Burnt-out cottage."

"Lit up the sky, all right."

"People get out safely?"

"One did, one didn't."

The telephone rang. Freckles rolled away and held a belligerent conversation with somebody named Din. When he came back, he said, "He had a nice funeral, anyway."

"Who did?"

"Guy who got killed in the fire. Drake Hazlitt."

"He was killed?"

"I hope so. We sure as hell buried him."

Thorpe asked for another beer and provided one for the bartender. He took a drink, experiencing the hunter's excitement. "What about the one who got out?"

"She got clean away. His wife, Veronica. Out of court and out of town."

"There was a trial?"

"An inquest. They couldn't pin it on her, not enough evidence. But she had the motive and the opportunity. See, he was what-do-you-call-it, one of those wheelchair cases, a paraplegic."

"She married him like that?"

"Hell, no. He was Drake Hazlitt. You from around here?"

"Montreal." Thorpe noted lack of comprehension in the man's eyes. "Originally from Kentucky."

"Everybody around here knew Drake Hazlitt. He drove in the stock-car races. But he had a bad pile-up one time and lost the use of his legs. This was after he married Veronica. His luck was all bad once he got with her."

"So he wasn't mobile when the fire hit."

"That's right. Burned to death trying to get out of his bed, poor bastard."

"Could have been an accident."

"Could have been. But he'd been telling Veronica if she did any more of her messing around with other men, he was going to divorce her without a cent. Telling her this in public. See, Drake had some money."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thorpe had the picture now. There was two inches of beer in his glass and one question left. "What about her brother?"

"Who?"

"Her brother Elvin, the musician."

"Veronica never had a brother—she was an only child." The bartender narrowed his eyes. "Nature wouldn't make *that* mistake twice."

The Kentucky trip was off. Angered at being driven from his turf by this crazy woman, Thorpe drove back to Montreal at speed, arriving close to midnight. He was tired and hungry but he couldn't delay the confrontation with Veronica. He put the car away, then walked on down to the Carousel Showbar. The room was packed, the atmosphere humid with sweat and perfume, almost opaque with tobacco smoke. On stage, the band was emptying amplifiers full of mediocre jazz into the sump of drunken conversation. The only place Thorpe could find to stand was at the corner of the bar where the waiters collected their orders. He managed to eyeball Elvin Patch, raised his glass, received a nod in return.

When the set ended, the musician joined him and accepted his drink. "Thanks, good health."

"You recognize me?"

"Yeah. You're the guy with Veronica."

"Is she here tonight?"

"Supposed to be coming in."

"Good. I would have words with her."

Patch grinned. "Lovers' quarrel."

"Not exactly. I've just come back from Milford-on-Cayuga." Thorpe waited for a reaction. Getting none, he said, "Have you ever been there?"

"I've heard Veronica talk about it."

"I thought you were born there."

"I'm from Denver. What is this?"

Thorpe tried to calm down. "Okay, I've got no quarrel with you. I owe you some briefing." He explained his visit to Veronica's hometown, his discovery that her story about a husband tragically disfigured and sending her out to find love elsewhere was a lie. That Drake Hazlitt was dead, probably murdered by his wife but they couldn't pin it on her. "So I suggest you be very careful," Thorpe concluded, "if you intend to stay with this woman."

She was in the press of people, close at his shoulder. "Don't you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

think you should consult me," Veronica said, "before you begin spreading your poison?"

"Good. I'm glad you heard."

"How was Kentucky? Short trip."

"I was in Milford. I didn't plan to stop there, it just happened. I know the truth now. Drake is dead—under suspicious circumstances."

Veronica pushed both hands through her hair like a swimmer rising from a dive into a deep pool. "All right," she said briskly, "let's get it straight."

"I think I've done that."

"Who did you talk to in Milford?" she asked, glancing here and there about the room.

"I didn't get his name. A chunky fellow with freckles, tends bar at the roadhouse near the lake."

She put her head back in a silent laugh. "You've been listening to Scrubby Palmer. He's hated me since high school when I refused to put out for him. Scrubby Palmer? He'd lie all day to hurt me."

"You mean he made it all up about Hazlitt dying in the fire and you being criticized at the inquest?"

"There was an inquest, of course there was. There always is. So what?"

"And your husband. Was he killed?"

Her face began to break up. "God, yes—"

"So you *did* lie to me."

"Jerry, don't you see? The story I told you is what I want to have happened. I loved Drake, just the way I love you now. I can't live with what really happened. So I change it. He's alive and blessing me, wanting me to go on and be happy. Is that so bad?"

Elvin Patch shook her gently by the shoulder. She went off balance, falling against Thorpe. He cradled her in one arm. It felt good—the people around seeing him holding this lovely woman helped it feel good.

"What about this guy," Thorpe said, the sting gone from his voice. "Is he your brother? You never had a brother."

"All men are brothers," Patch said, passing him a wink.

"I said it so you wouldn't be jealous. I'd just met you and I didn't want to lose you. Elvin is a dear old friend, he lets me stay in his flat. We don't do anything, right, Elvin?"

"Not so's you'd notice," the musician said. He lifted Thorpe's glass from his hand. "Owe you a drink, man."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When the club closed, they went home to Patch's flat, a dingy set of rooms up a creaking flight of stairs. "I'm on a three-month contract at the Carousel," he said as he opened the door on an arrangement of sprung furniture and threadbare carpet festooned with soiled clothing, "otherwise I couldn't afford such a nice place."

Thorpe had begun laughing at everything Patch said. Veronica was radiant now, posing with two bottles of wine purchased from the bar before they left the club. Soon they were eating scrambled eggs and toast and drinking wine from teacups.

"Happy now?" Veronica asked.

"Delirious," Thorpe said. It was close to the truth.

"Stick with us," Patch advised him, pressing his wrists together as though in handcuffs. "You'll wear bracelets." He rummaged in a flat tin. "Time for a smoke."

Thorpe seldom used dope but he inhaled a few drags tonight with his friends, it being a special occasion. Later, he slipped from his chair onto his knees on the floor. They raised him by the arms and stretched him out on the bed amid the disarray of clothing. He fell asleep, and when he came out of it the room was dark and silent. He rolled over and touched Patch, turned the other way and found Veronica. She opened her arms to him, kissed him. "In bed like an old married couple," she said.

"I'm already married."

"Tonight you're married to me." She loosened his tie.

"What about Patch?"

She giggled. "He's the best man."

"We'll see about that," Thorpe said.

His remorse at ten o'clock in the morning when he woke up was the deepest Thorpe had ever experienced. He got up quietly, used the seedy bathroom, and let himself out without disturbing them. He stopped for breakfast on the way home, arriving at the apartment around eleven. As he came in, the telephone was ringing. Too much. She could not leave him alone for a minute. What had he been thinking of last night, accepting her apologies and forgiving her and allowing the relationship to continue? How could he let himself sink to the level of these two drifters?

After a few minutes' silence, the telephone began ringing again. Right, he would tell her off now in such a way she would never bother him again. "Hello?"

"You're back, thank goodness. Where were you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Millie?" His wife's voice disoriented Thorpe. "I was going back to Kentucky to see you."

"Good thing you didn't. I'm here."

"In Montreal?"

"Registered at the Queen Elizabeth. Room nine-sixteen. I came first to the apartment but you weren't there. I asked the superintendent and he said you'd gone away, so I checked in here."

"I'm coming over."

"Why did you send for me if you weren't going to be home?"

"Send for you?"

"The telegram said to take the first available flight."

There was only one explanation. This crazy development had Veronica written all over it. But why, what was she up to? "I'm coming over," Thorpe said again before he put down the telephone.

Mildred saw that something was wrong as soon as he came into the hotel room. "You don't even look like yourself. What's happening around here?"

"I've been working hard."

"You're supposed to be marketing whiskey. Let the nation drink it."

"There was a party last night." He stood looking down nine floors to the traffic on Dorchester Boulevard. Feeling short of breath, he opened the window. "Tell me more about the telegram."

Mildred Thorpe was neat and clean in a tailored traveling suit, black corduroy, white collar and cuffs. Her straight brown hair was washed shiny and hung straight over heavy cheeks. She was a schoolgirl, twenty years on, not much changed. "Who sent for me, the company?"

"I doubt it."

"Is something wrong?"

"Yes, but I intend to put it right." He went to the door.

"You just got here—"

"I have to do this now while I know where a certain party is."

"What do *I* do? Stay here? Go to the apartment?"

"Stay here for now. When I come back, we'll check you out and move over to Drummond Street."

"Be quick as you all can," she said in her down-home voice, so intense it made him realize how much he used to love her. "This situation is most peculiar."

Thorpe's two-fisted pounding brought Elvin Patch to the door in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his shorts, white-eyed. He brushed past the startled musician and went to stand over Veronica, who was still half asleep, holding the sheet under her chin with a knotted fist. It wasn't even a bed, he realized for the first time—it was a mattress on the floor.

"This is it," he said to her, kicking the edge of the mattress. "You sent for my wife."

Normal existence was choppy water to Veronica Hazlitt. Arguing, fighting, other kinds of strife were like a coating of oil. "You'll thank me one day," she said calmly. "I've done you a favor."

"She sees me after last night's binge. I have nothing to say to her."

"That's the point. It's time you got yourself straight with your wife. Tell her what you told me, that you want a divorce."

"I never told you that."

"Not in so many words, but it's what you need. Then you'll be free to marry me." She dropped the sheet and stood gracefully. The only uncoordinated part of her was her mind. "Excuse me, I have to go to the john."

"You've got a funny idea of my relationship with my wife. I'm not ready to talk to her about a divorce."

"Then leave it to me." From behind the bathroom door, Veronica called out to him, "I know exactly what to say to your wife."

If he was going to move Mildred into the apartment, Thorpe told himself, he would have to do some cleaning up. He left Patch's place and walked home. It was a serene Sunday morning. Church bells were ringing. Couples leading uncomplicated lives were walking the streets behind little girls in cute hats. When he got the place shipshape, he would go and get Millie and bring her home, let her find the apartment the way she would expect to see it.

He plugged in the vacuum cleaner and went over all the carpets. Then he got out the tin of spray-wax and went around polishing surfaces. The smell of the wax was what made a place seem clean. As a boy, Thorpe had always come and gone from a house that smelled of lemon oil.

He was putting clean sheets on the bed when fatigue from the day and the night before caught up with him. He stretched out and closed his eyes. Forty winks and then he would ring Millie. He was slipping under when he was roused by the ringing of the doorbell. He went and opened the door and saw a policeman and a policewoman. Their faces were solemn.

"Mr. Thorpe?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes."

"Could you come with us, please? There's been an accident."

He was driven in the police cruiser to the Queen Elizabeth Hotel. As he was escorted across the lobby to the elevators, all activity ceased. In the room on the ninth floor, he was not surprised to find Veronica sitting in an armchair talking to a detective in a grey suit. He had known she would be here, he told himself. That must be why he went home and spent all that time cleaning the apartment. And why he fell asleep. He had stayed away from the situation so that Veronica could have a clear field.

Veronica had given her statement. Now the detective questioned him. Thorpe told the story he knew had to be told, supplied the pieces to make a picture that was neat and complete. Yes, he had summoned his wife to Montreal. They had been living apart for a while but he was ready now for her to move into his apartment on Drummond Street. Arriving unexpectedly, a few days early, she had found nobody home and so had taken a room at the hotel. Thorpe had been about to come and get her.

"I did my best to save her," Veronica prompted him. "She was really wild, Jerry. She was out that window before I could get a proper hold on her."

Here was the opening if Thorpe wanted to use it. Tell them about the death of Drake Hazlitt and the rumors in Milford of Veronica's involvement. Say that *she* had lured Mildred Thorpe to Montreal. Put forward his suspicion that Veronica had come to the hotel and started an argument which ended with her thrusting the smaller woman through the open window. It was a theory in line with her past psychopathic behavior.

But if he said this, it would be out in the open that he had been spending time with the psychopath. The story would make a bad smell in the executive suite at Zenith Distillers. He could kiss promotion goodbye, might even be forced to resign if the Old Man was of a mind. He would be convicted without trial of conspiracy to murder his wife. *The smoke/fire syndrome.*

"I should have seen it coming," Thorpe said, shielding his eyes. "Millie was depressed. She'd been upset about leaving Kentucky to come and live here. But I needed her, so I persuaded her to come." He turned to Veronica. "Thanks for doing your best," he said.

Elvin Patch was waiting outside in a rusting sedan. Thorpe and Veronica were turned loose by the police after being told there would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have to be an autopsy. If the medical officer found no foreign substances in her body, they would release Thorpe's wife to him for burial.

"They want to be sure we didn't poison her first," Veronica said. "As if we could ever do a thing like that." She suggested some food and drink back at his place and Thorpe was too shattered to refuse. Inside the apartment, she sniffed and ran a fingertip over a gleaming table. "This place is like a bank," she said.

Thorpe poured wine while Patch searched the kitchen cupboards for the makings of an impromptu meal. Veronica gave Thorpe a kiss. "You're miserable at the moment," she said, "but I am going to make you happier than you've ever been. All we needed was a chance and now we've got it." She carried her glass away into the other room to get some music going.

Patch grinned as he opened a tin of kidney beans. "She plays you like one of my keyboards," he said.

"I'm beginning to hate my life," Thorpe said. "I'm envious of Millie—she's got no more problems."

"Marry Veronica," Patch advised him. "You'll be gone by the end of summer."

For only the second time since his posting to head office, Thorpe was invited to lunch in the Old Man's private dining room. The president of Zenith Distillers never took a meal outside. Some said it was a hangover from the time of Prohibition when he had made the first of many millions supplying whiskey to gangsters in the States. In those days there had been competitors who wanted him dead (one of them, it was said, ended up swallowing the muzzle of the Old Man's gun), so he acquired the habit of staying out of public places.

Today, he was a robust septuagenarian with a bald head and rimless glasses perched on a hawk nose. A uniformed woman brought them their food and went away. There were no windows in the paneled room, no sounds except the clink of silver on china and the suck of the Old Man's dentures. "Getting your feet back on the ground now, Jerome?" he said.

"Yes, sir. Thank you for attending the funeral. I know you don't like crowds."

"I only met your wife once. She seemed a fine woman."

"She was troubled, sir."

The Old Man pushed his plate to one side, rested his elbows on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the table, made a church steeple of his fingers. "The directorship has to be filled before the general meeting in a month's time. This sad affair complicates things. I'd made up my mind, Jerome, to appoint you."

"I've been working toward that goal, sir. Working hard."

"I know you have. But as a director—I don't have to tell you this—you would be required to do high-level entertaining. A bachelor can't wine and dine our clients and their wives. Can't be done."

Thorpe spoke almost without thinking. "I should tell you, sir, that Mildred and I had been on the verge of breaking up for some time. She'd been under the care of a psychiatrist. I did all I could to make the relationship work, but—"

"I know, my boy."

"However, the point is I wanted my freedom from Mildred in order to marry a woman with whom I have been in love for the past year. Her name is Veronica. And now—tragic though the circumstances are—that marriage can go ahead."

"How nice for both of you. Things do work out for the best." The Old Man rang for coffee. "Give it several weeks for appearances' sake. And I, meanwhile, can appoint the new director I always wanted."

They were married in late September at a quiet ceremony in the vestry of St. James's United Church. Apart from the minister and Thorpe and Veronica, the only other people present were Elvin Patch and his percussionist, who acted as witnesses. At the dinner afterward, an expensive meal in a small Provençal restaurant on Crescent Street, Veronica went silent and pensive.

Patch kept the conversation going. "All right, then, what about the honeymoon, you two? You can afford it, Thorpe, with your promotion. Where will it be? South of France? Spain?"

"Appearances, man," Thorpe said. He was drinking again, finding it increasingly easy these days to achieve inebriation. "No big deal about this marriage, not this year. Must not distress the management."

Veronica spoke at last. "I want to visit Milford."

"Wow," Patch said. "A honeymoon in beautiful, downtown Milford-on-Cayuga."

"What do you want to go there for?" Thorpe asked.

"Humor me."

"It's crazy. I don't understand."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right, I'll tell you. I just want to walk in on Scrubby Palmer at that tacky roadhouse of his and let him see how I succeeded in spite of his wicked lies."

They drove out of Montreal on the following weekend, across the bridge into Upstate New York, down past autumn-splendid hillsides to the Finger Lakes District. No problem finding the town on this occasion—Veronica indicated every turn. The quiet main street arrived before Thorpe was ready for it, the burnt-out cottage, then the turn past the lake, and finally the roadhouse with its deserted gravel forecourt.

Thorpe switched off and stayed behind the wheel without opening his door. "Are you going to make an ugly scene?" he said. "I think I'll wait out here."

"Like hell. You're coming inside. You're the one who drove down here and gave him his chance to bad-mouth me. I want you present when I set him straight."

This is the punishment, Thorpe told himself as he swung numb legs from the car. And I'd better get used to it because now *I* am Veronica's husband.

The man she called Scrubby Palmer was watching them from behind the roadhouse door. They climbed the wooden steps onto the porch and went inside. He retreated behind the bar, stood with his hands on the beer taps as if he was about to launch a couple of torpedoes.

"Good evening, Scrubby," Veronica said. "I want to talk to you."

"What you see when you don't have a gun," he said.

The best thing Thorpe could say was, "Give us a couple of beers."

As he took the money and made change, Palmer said, "That's right, you're the guy who was in asking questions. I didn't know you were married to her. Or are you?"

"Yes. I wasn't then."

"You had a nerve, telling him lies about me," Veronica said.

"There was a fire, Drake was killed. There was an inquest and you left town. What lies?"

"You always were a nasty little rat. The girls all hated dancing with you. We were going to chip in and buy you a deodorant."

Palmer looked at Thorpe. "I'd appreciate it if you'd drink up and take her out of here."

"You should watch your mouth, Palmer," she said. "There are laws against slander."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You're a fine one to talk about laws."

Thorpe set his beer aside and got off the stool. "Okay, you've told him, let's go somewhere and eat."

But Veronica's eyes were staring with delight. She was smirking as she carried her glass down the bar and stood facing her old classmate. "I've been everywhere and done everything and you can't stand it. You're nothing."

"Shut up and get out of here."

"You tell *me* to shut up? After the things you've been saying?" She threw her beer in his face.

"Right." The bartender went to the telephone. "I'm getting the police."

"Like hell." Veronica was around the end of the bar before Thorpe could stop her. She flung open a drawer, fumbled inside, and brought out a pistol. "Scrubby's famous gun, still in the same place. He never had to use it, the place is too poor to be robbed. I wonder if it works."

"Put it down," Thorpe said.

Palmer dialed, then said, "Operator, police to Palmer's Hotel. We got trouble here."

"You've asked for it."

Veronica raised the gun and Thorpe caught her wrist. With the bar in the way, it was an awkward struggle. He rolled across the bar and came down beside her. Now he was able to twist her gun hand so the weapon was between them, but her strength surprised him. The noise when the gun went off was muffled by their bodies pressed together. Thorpe felt as if he had been punched in the stomach. There was no pain but he was suddenly weak, letting her go, sliding away into darkness.

Veronica let out a rising, wailing scream. "Look what you've done, Scrubby Palmer! See what you made me do!"

"Don't, Veronica."

"Now I'll never get out of this town—and it's all your fault!" She held the gun in both hands, took careful aim, and shot Palmer in the head.

A neighbor was standing in the parking lot when the police car arrived and two officers got out. "In there," he said, "in the bar. I heard two shots."

There were sounds of breaking glass and tumbling furniture from inside, a female voice cursing. One of the officers yelled, "Police! Come out with your hands up!" The breaking stopped.

There was a third shot, and then there was silence.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DETECTIVERSE

DEAD RIGHT

by DOUGLAS HARRELL

Ridiculing other teams
Was Gerald's way of playing.
Because of this
We've had our first
Trivial Pursuit slaying.

© *1985 by Douglas Harrell.*

"Q"

DEADLY CONVERSATION

by A. W. SARGENT

Her rapierlike tongue was renowned.
"You've cut to the quick," he frowned.
"A pity," she said.
He nodded his head,
Which caused it to fall to the ground.

© *1985 by A. W. Sargent.*

"Q"

DAILY PUZZLER

by R. C. SHEBELSKI

We all love a mystery,
But why each day that passes
Must I solve the same old one:
Where are my reading glasses?

© *1985 by R. C. Shebelski.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

GEORGE BAXT

"I went to his apartment several times," Hilda said.

"Hilda Tyson!" boomed Mrs. Swanson. "What would Austin think?"

"I really don't know. Shall we touch fingers and try for him?"

"What do your sisters think?"

"They don't care what I do," Hilda told her, "as long as I stay away from the kids . . ."

DREAM LOVER

by GEORGE BAXT

Shortly before Hilda Tyson's husband Austin died, he often complained of chest pains and shortness of money. He'd been a good provider, having managed one of a chain of supermarkets from which he stole regularly. That his petty thefts went undetected for over five years is attributable to his payoffs to the store's accountant. The accountant, unfortunately, perished in a six-car collision coming back from the beach one Sunday, which left Austin Tyson in a bit of a quandary. The store's books were to be audited by a new accountant known to everyone as "Honest Abe" Labbman. That's when Austin's chest pains began to intensify. In a confrontation with "Honest Abe," Austin apparently blinked his eyes like a semaphore run amok, foamed at the mouth, clutched at his chest, and fell headlong into an open vat of sour pickles.

The store soft-pedaled what might have been a very unpleasant scandal. Hilda received a fairly healthy check, representative of Austin's profit-sharing arrangement bestowed upon him when he became full manager, and one day after the funeral made plans to acquire a second husband. She was still a young woman, just past

© *1985 by George Baxt.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her fortieth birthday. She had married Austin at an age considered a bit late for marriage, especially in Sheffield, Pennsylvania. She'd been thirty-seven years old when Austin had popped the question, fifteen years past the marriageable limit set for spinsters in Sheffield.

There were no children, for at Hilda's age that would be unthinkable. It made no difference to Hilda. She didn't mind children as long as they weren't underfoot and screaming for cookies and milk. Her two sisters had children, three apiece, and she didn't like them one bit. She adored frightening the hell out of them at night with ghost stories and tales of gory murders, and at one giddy moment entertained the notion of sending them poison-pen letters. The story sessions were brought to an abrupt halt when two of the children suffered convulsions and the other four ran away from home in concert and had to be tracked down and returned at great expense to the parents and the Sheffield police force. When Austin finally popped the question to Hilda, it came as a relief not only to her, but to her family and the majority of the township's population.

Everybody in Sheffield knew Hilda. You couldn't miss her. She was so ugly, she was almost beautiful. She was a joiner. She participated in just about everything that offered the prospect of companionship or a husband. She was a leader of the Little Theater Group Movement and her Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* was still discussed, although in hushed whispers and with furtive glances over the shoulder. Her Single Women for Osgood Hubbard for Mayor movement when Hubbard, the town's leading alcoholic, decided to run for office was the driving force in propelling Hubbard into office.

"Hilda's a tiger, a panther, a leopard," commented Hubbard between hiccups.

Actually, he had, in a drunken moment, made a lewd proposition to Hilda, who assumed that meant he intended to leave his wife and marry her once he was elected. Hubbard, of course, remembered none of it, but it was too late for Hilda, he was already in. In the second year of her marriage to Austin, Hilda campaigned violently against Hubbard and there are those who still suspect that his sudden death by gunshot wound to the left temple was suicide.

"Three years of marriage," sighed Hilda to her friend Edna Ruth Swanson, who was independently wealthy and spent her life plaiting paper flowers for those less fortunate.

"Well, at least you had that," said Edna Ruth with an exaggerated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sigh as her nimble fingers intertwined paper tulips with paper hollyhocks in amazingly colorful patterns.

"Austin was a good man," said Hilda as Edna Ruth's mother came in from the kitchen, rolling a tea cart. "He treated me good and never cheated with another woman." Mrs. Hubbard snorted. "What does that snort mean?"

"Hilda, who besides you would have Austin Tyson?" Mrs. Swanson was the sort of woman known as plain spoken and brutally blunt.

"Must you be unkind?" asked Edna Ruth of her mother.

"I'm not being unkind—I've made an honest statement. Hilda was a bit longer in the tooth than most when she accepted Austin. Austin only married her because he thought she had money."

Hilda wasn't annoyed. She was used to Mrs. Swanson's gentle perorations. And Mrs. Swanson was right in her assessment of the late small-time swindler. Hilda never loved him. Austin was a convenience, like a dishwasher or a nineteen-inch color television set. Actually, his proposal had taken her so unawares she had accepted before he could realize what he'd done, in case he had no idea what he was doing. To Sheffield, Austin was a foreigner. He came from Pittsburgh. Everyone had said if Hilda ever married it would have to be a betrothal with an alien—surely no man in Sheffield who was considered reasonably sane would have her.

Austin arrived in Sheffield just a few months before Hilda's mother and father died in a plane crash in Europe while on holiday. They had provided well for their three daughters, and their lawyer, Edward Dimsdale, was quick to let the whole town know about it. Austin, a naturally pale man, took on a healthy color when he heard Hilda was an heiress and pursued her with the passionate avidity of an Englishman on horseback hunting down a fox. What he didn't understand was that Hilda was foxier. She recognized the pursuit and accepted it with alacrity. She wanted "Mrs." in front of her name worse than she wanted to be ravished by Johnny Carson, and when she got it she didn't care about the snickers and the cruel jests that became epidemic in the village. Anyway, Austin seemed downright genuine when he raved about her Nora in *A Doll's House*.

"I wish Ibsen had been sitting next to me," he told Hilda over an orange phosphate. Hilda said she wished he'd been out front, too—he might have hushed the giggling and the catcalls.

"Austin didn't marry me just for my money," said Hilda proudly to Mrs. Swanson while Edna Ruth plunged a hand into a plate of chocolate-covered muffins.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mrs. Swanson slapped Edna Ruth's hand with a gruffly admonishing, "Fingers, Edna Ruth!"

"Austin and I married for companionship," continued Hilda. "We had a lovely time together. And while I miss him very much, I have every intention of marrying again."

Mrs. Swanson almost dropped the cup of tea she was holding out to Hilda. "Marry again? How?"

"What do you mean 'how'?" demanded Hilda as she rescued the tea and spooned sugar into it. "Austin found me and married me, didn't he?"

"For your money," persisted Mrs. Swanson.

"Oh, Mama, stop that!" said Edna Ruth.

"I've still got my money," said Hilda, leaning forward with an ominous look on her unattractive face. "He didn't try to touch a penny of it. He had his own. We lived on what he earned and we lived very well and you know that's true." Mrs. Swanson said nothing.

"I shall advertise for a husband," said Hilda.

Silence descended over the three like an enchanted cloak. Mrs. Swanson finally spoke. "I think that's perfectly awful."

"No, it isn't. Austin subscribed to a lot of New York magazines, and in one of them singles advertise for partners. I've investigated it and I'm told it's a thriving industry." Hilda looked so self righteous, she might have been a candidate for sainthood.

"That's downright dangerous!" thundered Mrs. Swanson. "You'll be getting letters from maniacs and murderers and—and—and Mediterraneans!" Mrs. Swanson's xenophobia was as celebrated in Sheffield as her rotten mouth.

"I've already placed the ad," said Hilda and finally sipped her tea. "Too sweet. Can I have a fresh cup, please?"

Several weeks later, Hilda's advertisement bore fruit. Letters were forwarded to her from the New York offices of the magazine. Most enclosed photographs of the prospective suitors and several prompted swift replies from Hilda. She set aside a week in which she would travel to New York and made appointments with six of the likely candidates.

"Be careful!" warned Mrs. Swanson in a Cassandra voice dark with foreboding and doom. "What you've done is bad enough, but going to New York *alone* and unchaperoned."

"You're so old-fashioned," said Hilda. "All of Sheffield is so old-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fashioned. I sometimes think it's a throwback to the Dark Ages. I expect to have a perfectly lovely time in New York. I'm booked into the Algonquin Hotel."

"Never heard of it," said Mrs. Swanson.

"It's a very famous theatrical hotel in the heart of Times Square."

"Oh, how I long to be in the heart of Times Square," said Edna Ruth plaintively.

Of course, all of Sheffield was abuzz with Hilda's trip to New York to find a second husband. It was not only the talk of the town, but thanks to some itinerant peddlers it spread to several outlying districts and even the nearby Amish showed interest. One of Sheffield's leading gamblers was offering decent odds on whether Hilda would or would not meet with success, and to everyone's surprise and the admiration of some, Hilda placed a bet on herself.

Edna Ruth wept when Hilda said goodbye, and Mrs. Swanson, in a surprising burst of generosity, offered her the late Mr. Swanson's revolver, which usually rested under her pillow. But Hilda declined and, quoting lavishly from Shakespeare—"Now voyager, set thou forth and sail"—she boarded the train to New York in a new outfit she had made for herself.

A week later, Hilda was back in Sheffield. She returned under the cover of darkness quite late at night on the milk train she picked up in Philadelphia. The Swansons were the first to hear from her the next morning.

"So you're back!" boomed Mrs. Swanson.

Edna Ruth clapped her hands with joy. "Well, so who's the lucky feller?" In her heart, she wished Hilda's excursion a failure.

"My cup runneth over," said Hilda hoarsely.

"You're drinking?"

"No! I've met Mr. Right at last."

Mrs. Swanson's heart sank. "You're kidding."

"His name is Irving Bonnard."

"Spell Bonnard."

Hilda spelled it.

"That sounds Mediterranean."

"He's French. That is, his parents came from France—he was born in New York. Oh, Mrs. Swanson, he's such a wonderful man."

"Come on over, I want to hear all about it."

"After I phone my sisters and tidy up the house a bit."

An hour later, Hilda sat in the Swansons' front parlor with Edna

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ruth and her mother. "He's forty-three years old and a widower. His wife died of some awful disease three years ago. He hasn't any children."

"What about his money?" Mrs. Swanson's arms were folded over her flat chest.

"He's a stockbroker, which is what makes it difficult for him to come to Sheffield right now. He has to keep his seat on the stock exchange warm. He has a beautiful apartment on the East Side of Manhattan."

Mrs. Swanson's eyebrows shot up. "You went to his apartment? *Alone?*"

"Oh, don't be such an old bluenose. I went to his apartment several times."

Edna Ruth gasped.

Mrs. Swanson had paled. "You—you didn't—"

Hilda smiled beatifically.

"Hilda Tyson!" boomed Mrs. Swanson. "What would Austin think?"

"I really don't know. Shall we touch fingers and try for him?"

"What do your sisters think?"

"They don't care what I do as long as I stay away from the kids."

"Isn't he ever going to come to visit?" asked Edna Ruth.

"He's going to try. Meantime, we're writing each other every day and phoning every weekend and probably I'll be going up to New York from time to time."

"Well, I'll be darned," said Mrs. Swanson.

Sheffield and environs were absolutely astonished, and in a way rather pleased. Hilda had triumphed and it was the Cinderella story come true. Only one person in Sheffield was unhappy—Jake Upfield, the gambler. But he was not about to pay off until Hilda produced Irving Bonnard in person.

"No Irving, no payoff," said Jake, who everyone knew or suspected had dangerous connections.

"How dare you doubt me!" cried Hilda, drawing herself up as she recalled doing in Shaw's *Saint Joan*.

"*I* dare doubt you, baby, because without no corpus delicti, I don't deliver the cash."

"And what if I produce letters from Irving Bonnard?"

"Anybody can write letters, kiddo."

"What if I have him phone you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Anybody can impersonate anybody on the telephone. You produce Irving Bonnard right here in Sheffield, with credentials, and I'll produce the payoffs."

All those who had gambled on Hilda were beginning to grumble. Mrs. Swanson grumbled the loudest. She had bet against Hilda, and if there was any doubt as to the existence of Irving Bonnard she wanted her money from Jake and she wanted it now. But Jake was adamant.

Hilda phoned New York. Shortly, flowers were wired to her from Irving Bonnard in New York with a card that contained a loving message.

Jake was not convinced. Jake phoned New York, too, and confronted Hilda. "There's no phone for an Irving Bonnard in New York."

"Well, of course not, you silly. It's not listed. He's a stockbroker. They never list their private numbers."

"What house is he with?" persisted Jake. A brick had been thrown through his window the previous evening, which meant there was at least one brave soul at large in Sheffield.

"He's with Goldberg Freres. A French firm because his origins are from France."

Jake phoned Goldberg Freres in New York. He was put through to Irving Bonnard immediately. He got straight to the point and said, "I think you're a phony, Bonnard. If you've got all that wealth and position, why do you want to marry an ugly broad from a small town in Pennsylvania?" Bonnard remonstrated. "Oh, I get it," said Jake. "You're greedy. What you've got ain't enough. Now you want to add Hilda's dough to your pile." There was silence from Bonnard. Jake laughed. "So I hit the nail on the head. Why, you dirty lowdown so-and-so, with all your assets you're out to get Hilda's." Bonnard found his voice at the other end and again remonstrated. "Bonnard—" and Jake pronounced his name with a nasty sneer "—I don't think you're for real. You come on down to Sheffield and prove you really exist." Jake listened to what Bonnard said, and then slammed the phone down.

Later that day, Jake ran into Hilda on the Main Street. "I had a long chat with your boyfriend."

"I thought you would," commented Hilda coolly. "Satisfied?"

"No," snarled Jake.

"I never thought you'd turn out to be a four flusher, Jake Upfield!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hilda looked as though she was about to swat the gambler with her handbag.

"You'll eat them words, Hilda. By the by, your boyfriend's on his way."

"On his way here?"

"Here. Sheffield. Where'd you think? How come you didn't tell him how rich you are?"

Hilda stared at the man without seeing him.

"Cat got your tongue, Hilda?" Jake was picking at his teeth with a fingernail, a sly look on his face. Hilda hurried away from him, hurried home, hurried to the phone. She called New York, but Irving Bonnard had left for the day. He wasn't expected back for several days. He'd said he had some business to conduct out of town. Hilda sat and thought. She thought some more and then covered her face with her hands.

Jake spread the word that Irving Bonnard was arriving in Sheffield on the six twenty-eight. Mrs. Swanson wondered if they'd put together the town band to greet him, the only problem being that nobody knew what the man looked like. The town was buzzing, and by six o'clock there was a sizable crowd gathered outside Hilda's house. Jake Upfield positioned himself across the street, leaning against a lamp post, wondering why Hilda didn't come out and shoo the crowd away.

Hilda was in her neat, almost pristine-looking kitchen. It was there that she heard the whoo-whoo'ing of the six twenty-eight as it pulled into the dinky station.

She crossed into the neat, pristine-looking front parlor. At a window, she moved the curtain slightly and stared out at the people milling about on the sidewalk, then she walked to the piano, sat down, and played a Chopin etude, badly, a look of peace and serenity on her face. She heard the clatter of one of the town's four taxis as it pulled up outside, heard the cab door slam shut and then the rising murmur of voices and then the door chimes. She stood up, smoothed her dress, and went to the front door and opened it.

"Hello," she said with a wonderful smile. "What a surprise!"

He came into the room and Hilda shut the door. The crowd outside wondered what was going on. Jake Upfield developed a twitch in his right eye. The man who got out of the cab was young and good-looking. He couldn't have been more than thirty years old. He was tall and slim and seemed somewhat effete. Jake saw himself shelling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out a lot of payoffs. Then he remembered what Mrs. Swanson had told everyone. According to Hilda, Irving Bonnard was in his forties. This Irving Bonnard was definitely not in his forties.

Then the horrendous shrieks emerged from the house. "No, Irving, no! Don't! *Don't! Help! Help!*" Several men rushed for the front door, but just as they reached it it was flung open.

Hilda stood there with a blood-stained knife in her hand. Her dress was torn and her face was scratched. "He went mad! He tried to kill me!" She held the knife in front of her face, remembering her Mrs. Manningham in *Angel Street*. "Oh, my God! He's dead! What have I done in self-defense? Oh, God!"

Irving Bonnard was indeed dead. There were numerous knife wounds in his chest and, for some strange reason, his hands. "Trying to defend *him*self," Jake Upfield later deduced.

The police arrived fifteen minutes later and the chief was quick to deduce that a murder had taken place. The knife was appropriated for evidence and a hysterical Hilda was taken to her bedroom by some of her neighbors. Mrs. Swanson yelped when she heard the news and Edna Ruth fainted, though Mrs. Swanson couldn't tell right away. Hilda's sisters uttered a variety of expletives and one reminded the other she always knew Hilda's adventure in New York would bring her to no good end.

Justice was swift in Sheffield. Hilda had been victimized, and in defending herself had murdered her assailant. Hilda was a heroine, though in this case she provided her own dialogue. She thanked everyone for their kindness and assistance and swore never to look for a second husband again. Irving Bonnard's body was shipped to Goldberg Freres, who didn't quite know what to do with it until an office boy suggested they contact some obscure cousins in the Arles area of France who, when contacted and told how much it would cost to bury Irving (all this through an interpreter), declined the honor of providing the funeral and so Irving was buried at the company's expense.

It was Jake Upfield who found all this out in a private investigation of his own. He had paid out a lot of money to the Sheffield citizens who had bet on Hilda and he had suffered the loss badly. He called on Hilda and told her about Irving's funeral.

Hilda sat quite calm and composed as she listened. "That was terribly kind of his employers."

"Yeah," said Jake, "it was, the guy being only a trainee clerk. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

also talked to Irving's roommate. You know, the one in whose name the phone is listed. He's very suspicious about Irving's death." Hilda said nothing, continuing to sit calmly with her hands folded on her lap. "Irving told him how he answered your ad and met you for a drink at the hotel and wasn't exactly pleased with what he saw." Hilda's look lay somewhere between scorn and determination. "He was the last guy on your list and you were desperate. So you made a deal with him. Pose as your boyfriend from long distance and then, after a reasonable amount of time, announce the arrangement couldn't work because he couldn't move to Sheffield and you decided you didn't want to live in New York.

"But then when I phoned and told him how rich you are, Irving decided to come here after all and get as much out of you as he could on threat of humiliating you forever. After all, even old lady Swanson said you told her Irving was in his forties, and here we have an Irving who ain't yet thirty. Hilda, I've paid out an awful lot of money I don't think I should have paid out." He was leaning against the piano, but Hilda knew he wasn't about to break into song. "Hilda—" he nailed her name to her ear "—I think you should take care of me."

Hilda smiled. It was a strange smile, a smile Jake Upfield might have recognized as dangerous if he had known her better. The smile was Irving Bonnard's last memory before the knife came plunging into his chest the first time.

"Yes, Jake Upfield. I think you're right." She continued smiling. "I think I should take care of you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Uncle George Crowder story by

HUGH PENTECOST

"You know that I'm a lawyer?" Uncle George said.

"Yes, sir."

"You need a lawyer."

Lewis's mouth took a bitter twist. "I don't have any money for a lawyer, Mr. Crowder."

"I'm not here ambulance-chasing, son," Uncle George said. "You need help. I'm here to offer it . . ."

MISMATCH

by HUGH PENTECOST

The watchtower was at the very top of the mountain overlooking the New England village of Lakeview. From the top of the tower, which loomed above the trees, you could see hundreds and hundreds of acres of woodland. The tower had been the brainchild of old Marcus Goodrich, who had a beautiful estate at the foot of the mountain. A forest fire swooping down the hills could destroy everything old Marcus held dear, and so Marcus built the tower, which was actually a giant, circular water tank, fed from an artesian well Marcus had drilled, a gasoline-powered pump doing the job. From the top of the tower a fire could be spotted long before it threatened Marcus Goodrich, and, incidentally, the village of Lakeview.

And that was not all old Marcus did to protect himself and the town. He established a trust fund to pay the salaries of fire wardens to check on the woods during the hot dry summer months, make sure the tower tank was full and the pump motor working, and climb the iron staircase that wound up around the tower to the balcony at the top to spot any smoke that could be the result of a fire started by a thoughtless camper, hunter, or fisherman . . .

© *1985 by Hugh Pentecost.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Most small towns have a few citizens who are referred to as "characters." Lakeview's most prominent character was George Crowder, who lived at the foot of the mountain in a log cabin. Crowder, a brilliant lawyer, had once been the county attorney, and most people had thought he would someday be governor of the state, or possibly their representative in the United States Senate. But then Crowder, as county attorney, had convicted a man of murder and seen the state take the man's life. Later, new evidence revealed the fact that the man had been completely innocent.

George Crowder had convicted the man on evidence supplied by the state police and no one blamed him for the tragic miscarriage of justice—no one but Crowder himself. "I should have sensed the truth," he told his sister Esther, who was married to Hector Trimble, the local druggist. He resigned his post and disappeared from Lakeview. Not even Esther knew where he had gone or what he was doing with his life. "Drinking himself to death somewhere," was the local guess.

Then, ten years after his disappearance, George Crowder reappeared one day in Lakeview, older, a little greyer. He built himself the log cabin at the foot of the mountain and settled down there with his setter dog to a life of fishing and hunting, becoming a hero in the eyes of his nephew, Joey Trimble, Esther's son, now fourteen years old.

"My Uncle George is the best man with a gun, the best man with a fishing rod, and the best man at training dogs in the town of Lakeview—maybe in the world," he said. His praise resulted in George Crowder becoming known affectionately in the village as "Uncle George."

Some time ago, Uncle George Crowder had volunteered to check out the watchtower on weekends during the summer months. The paid wardens hated to work on the weekends, yet that was the very time when hunters, campers, and fishermen were most likely to be in the woods. On this particular Sunday, Uncle George had company on his climb to the top—his nephew Joey. His dog Timmy scampered ahead of them, looking for whatever there was to find. A trip up the mountain was always an education for Joey. Uncle George identified strange flowers and plants and pointed out the trails of animals, large and small. "He can read the woods," Red Egan, the local sheriff, said, "like most of us can handle *McGuffey's Reader*."

There was no particular hurry to reach the top, and Uncle George and Joey stopped first to look at a marvelous growth of wild orchids,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then at the evidence a beaver had been cutting wood to build a dam across a stream that tumbled down the mountain, then at the scene of what Uncle George guessed had been a fight between a woodchuck and a stray dog. Finally the tower came into view and Joey grabbed at his uncle's arm.

"Look, Uncle George—there's someone up there."

On the balcony that circled the top of the tower, Uncle George could see a blonde girl wearing a pale-blue summer dress. She was gripping the single handrail, looking down at them. He stopped a few yards from the tower, Joey beside him. Timmy came to heel, sat down, and gave the girl a cheerful bark.

"That's not supposed to be a sight-seeing place, young lady," Uncle George called up to her.

"Please go away!" the girl called down to him in a high, shrill voice.

"It's not safe for you up there," Uncle George said. The drop from the west side of the tower was about a hundred feet to the ground. The drop from the east was several hundred feet down into a rocky gorge.

"Go away, please!"

"It's my job to be here," Uncle George said. "To check the water pump and the supply in the tank."

"I wouldn't want Joey to watch," the girl said.

"That's Marilyn Twinam," Joey said. "What doesn't she want me to watch?"

Uncle George put his hand gently on the boy's shoulder. "She's planning to jump." He looked up at the girl. "You're Martin Twinam's daughter, aren't you?"

"Stepdaughter."

"I'm George Crowder."

"I know who you are, Mr. Crowder."

"You want to tell me why you're thinking of jumping?"

The girl leaned forward over the guardrail as if she had a sudden stomach cramp. For one bad moment Uncle George thought she might come tumbling down. "It might help to talk," he said.

The girl straightened up, gripping the handrail. "There's no use talking," she said. "I just have to decide if I want to live."

"I can think of a thousand reasons if you want to give me the time," Uncle George told her.

The girl peered off in the distance. "Yesterday was to have been my wedding day—only there was no wedding."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why?" Uncle George asked, like a man discussing the weather.

"Should I go for help?" Joey whispered.

"Just stay put and look interested," Uncle George whispered back.

"The bridegroom didn't show up," Marilyn Twinam said. "Didn't let me know, didn't even bother to tell me why."

"That's hard to understand—a beautiful girl like you." The girl turned away, moving a few feet away along the balcony—toward the east, and certain death if she fell. "You must have some notion why."

"He was bought off—or scared off," Marilyn said.

"Maybe you're lucky," said Uncle George. "A man who could be bought off or frightened off can't be a total loss."

"I guess you don't know my stepfather."

"Martin Twinam? I just know him to pass the time of day. Doesn't he approve of your young man?"

"He doesn't approve of anything that would make me happy," the girl said.

"Would it please him if you decided to jump?"

"That's the only reason I've hesitated," said Marilyn. "I don't want to please him."

"You mean if I brought him out here, you wouldn't give him the pleasure of watching you die?"

"You could never get him here in time to see it."

"What's your young man's name?"

"Fred Lewis."

"He used to work for her father," Joey whispered.

"Your father doesn't like him?" Uncle George asked the girl.

"My *stepfather*. He doesn't like anyone who could make me happy." She moved another few inches away.

"Let me ask you one more question, Marilyn, and I'll let you alone," Uncle George said. "Does it occur to you that there might be some totally different explanation for what happened than the one you imagine?"

"There could be no other reason."

"An accident," Uncle George said. "Fred could have been in an accident—he could be somewhere, badly hurt. He could have been taken to the hospital here in town, or a hospital in one of the neighboring towns. He could be unconscious, unable to tell anyone that you were waiting for him. Do me a favor, Marilyn. Let me go in to town and see if I can find some trace of Fred Lewis. If there's been an accident, then you'll know he wasn't a coward or a bribe taker.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Will you give me that much time, child? It could take me two or three hours."

"I don't know." She was tempted.

"I'll leave Joey and Timmy here to keep you company." Uncle George bent down to the boy. "Just keep her talking, casually. I think she'll wait till I come back."

"What if she doesn't?" the boy asked in a shaken voice.

"I shouldn't face you with this, Joey, but I have no choice." He turned to go and stopped by the black-and-white setter. "Stay, Timmy. Take care of Joey."

And he was gone.

Red Egan was George Crowder's oldest and closest friend. They had grown up together in the village and gone to elementary and high school together. Their ways had parted when George Crowder went off to college and law school. Later, when Uncle George was the county attorney, with Red Egan one of the law-enforcement people working under him, the two friends were together again. They spent their spare time hunting and fishing. If anyone in Lakeview knew from George Crowder what had happened in the ten years following the execution of the innocent man, Red Egan was that person.

Uncle George found the sheriff puttering in the vegetable garden at the back of his cottage.

"It's your day to be up the mountain, isn't it?" Red asked as his friend approached.

"Been and come back," Uncle George said.

Red Egan put down his cultivating fork and straightened up. "You look like you've got something on your mind, chum," he said. He took a pipe out of his pocket and began filling it from a plastic pouch. "So tell me a story, Uncle George," he said with a smile. He sat down on a garden bench and held a lighter to his pipe.

"This is just between us," Uncle George said.

"If you say so."

"Do you know a young man named Fred Lewis?"

Red Egan's smile faded. "Yes, I know him."

"He didn't turn up for a very important engagement yesterday," Uncle George said. "His wedding. I wondered if he could have been involved in an accident somewhere."

"He wasn't involved in an accident," Red said.

"How do *you* know?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Because I've got him in jail."

"On what charge?"

"Embezzlement," Red said. "Someone's been stealing money from Morgan Company, the firm Martin Twinam manages—thirty or forty thousand dollars. Twinam caught young Lewis in the act in the early hours of yesterday morning—just after midnight. Lewis was apparently planning to elope with Twinam's daughter. He had a marriage license on him. Twinam nabbed him, called me and the State Police, and we locked him up. He's being held without bail until a hearing before Judge Walters tomorrow morning."

Uncle George felt his jaw tighten. "Let me tell you why I came here looking for him," he said. "I went up the mountain with Joey this morning to make my Sunday check on the tower. When we got there, Marilyn Twinam was on the platform at the top of the tower. She was ready to take a dive, Red."

"Oh, brother!" Red said.

"I persuaded her to talk. It seems that Lewis not only didn't show up for the wedding, he didn't send word. —She says her stepfather doesn't approve of Lewis."

"I'll say."

"The girl concluded that Twinam bought Lewis off, or scared him off. She doesn't want to live."

"You got her down?" Red asked.

"No. But I convinced her there might have been an accident. I left Joey up there to keep her occupied until I can go back with an accident report or some other explanation that will satisfy her."

"He had an accident all right," Red said. "He got caught with his hand in the till."

"You think he's guilty?"

"Open and shut, from what we were told." Red hesitated. "Lewis did beg us to try to get in touch with her. I tried, personally, but no luck. Twinam said his not showing up would teach the girl a lesson, show her what a lowlife Lewis is. Hadn't you better tell Twinam what's cooking and take him up the Mountain? She's his daughter."

"Stepdaughter," Uncle George reminded him. "If she sees him coming, she'll go off the east side of the tower for sure."

"Twinam hasn't had very much luck with women," said Red. "His marriage to Ellen Stallings, a widow with a young daughter, was a marriage made in heaven, people said. They were obviously very much in love. Twinam adopted the daughter, Marilyn. Then, only two years after they became a family, Ellen died in the flu epidemic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we had back then and Twinam was left with a seven-year-old girl who apparently hated him. Amateur psychiatrists say the girl hated Twinam because he tried to take her real father's place. She's just a crazy, undisciplined kid in my book. A daughter needs a mother's discipline, a boy needs a father's. Twinam and his daughter are a mismatch."

"And the Lewis boy?"

"Not local, as you know. The Morgan Company makes and sells all kinds of farm machinery. When Twinam was persuaded to manage a branch here, the home company sent along a young mechanic who was a whiz at repairs and adjustments. Twinam took him on and Lewis worked for him until about a year ago they had some kind of a row and Twinam fired him. Some people say it was because young Lewis was too interested in Marilyn, some say it's because of drinking sprees. God knows. Anyway, it's been a war for about a year, with Twinam on one side and Lewis and the girl on the other."

"She's up on that tower, Red," Uncle George said. "I've got to have some kind of a sensible answer to get her down. Tell me about last night."

"Two stories," Red said. "Twinam's and the boy's. Twinam has been pretty much of a loner since his wife died. He's cared for Marilyn, provided her with a good home and an expensive education. But he appears to have no friends or social life here in Lakeview. Every Saturday night in summer, he takes off for Saratoga and the races. What is it, an hour and a half drive? He has friends up there, it seems, and after the races they get together for a few drinks. Twinam normally gets back here about two-thirty or three in the morning.

"Last night his routine was changed. Early in the evening, one of his friends had a heart attack at the track in Saratoga. They got him to the hospital and Twinam stayed until the doctors indicated the friend was going to make it. Twinam drove home a couple of hours ahead of schedule. His house, as you know, is right next to the Morgan Company's offices and storage barns. Twinam said he saw a light in the office. Money has been disappearing from time to time. He has a gun, which he's licensed to own and carry. He took it, went over to the office, and found Lewis there, with a few hundred in cash in his pockets—along with a marriage license. If Twinam hadn't come back early, Lewis would have been long gone."

"And Lewis's story?" Uncle George asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He did have a marriage license. He was on his way to meet Marilyn somewhere. Driving by the Morgan office, he saw a light on. He'd heard the stories about missing money and hoped if he could catch the thief he might improve his relationship with Twinam, who was, he supposed, in Saratoga. He went in and found Twinam there. Twinam pulled a gun, planted a bundle of cash on him, and called the State Police. According to Lewis, Twinam hates him so much he'd do anything to damage him."

"And you and the police believe Twinam?"

Red shrugged.

"How is Lewis supposed to have gotten into the office? He broke in?"

"He had a set of keys from the time he worked there. They were on him. Look, George, Twinam is a bitter man, an angry man, but he's lived here most of his life, he has a reputation for honesty and integrity in his business. He contributes to the hospital, the local clinic. The boy is a good mechanic, but with no reputation for anything else."

"Does he have a lawyer?" Uncle George asked.

"No."

"Well, he's got one now—if he'll have me. I've got to get him released, but quick. That girl isn't going to wait on that tower forever. Young Lewis is the one person who can get her down in one piece."

Fred Lewis was being held in a cell at the State Police Barracks about a mile from Red Egan's place. It might have involved considerable red tape for anyone else to get in to see him, but Uncle George had no problem. Captain Purdy, the commanding officer at the barracks, was a friend of long standing.

Lewis was a nice-looking blond boy in his early twenties. He was sitting on the edge of the cot in his cell, head buried in his hands, when the trooper who took Uncle George there announced a visitor. The boy looked up, eyes red from what must have been a sleepless night and possibly even tears.

"Mr. Crowder," he said.

"You know who I am, Fred?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know that I'm a lawyer?"

"Yes, sir."

"You need a lawyer."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lewis's mouth took a bitter twist. "I don't have any money for a lawyer, Mr. Crowder."

"I'm not here ambulance-chasing, son," Uncle George said. "You need help. I'm here to offer it."

"Why would you want to help me?"

"Marilyn is a friend of mine," Uncle George said.

Lewis was suddenly on his feet. "You know where she is? She knows what's happened?"

Uncle George hesitated.

"She knows you didn't show up yesterday. She's hurt. She needs to know why."

"You know why," Lewis said. "I was trying to do her father a favor and he framed me for a crime I didn't commit. Where is Marilyn? At the water tower?"

"What makes you think that?"

"I'm one of the volunteer fire wardens," Lewis said. "I know you're the Sunday-morning volunteer."

"That's where she is," Uncle George said. "Up on the platform, thinking to jump. I talked her into holding still until I found out what had happened to you. I suggested there may have been an accident."

"If I could only go to her!"

"Maybe Twinam will agree to drop his charges long enough for you to go there."

"You don't know him."

"I can give it my best try," Uncle George said.

Lewis held out his hand. "People are right about you, Mr. Crowder."

"How's that?"

"They say if you're an underdog and have no one to go to bat for you, George Crowder is the man to turn to."

Uncle George's face darkened. "I once turned my back on an innocent man," he said. "I owe him a debt I can never pay in full. I'll do what I can for you and Marilyn, boy."

From Captain Purdy's office, Uncle George tried to call Martin Twinam on the phone.

There was no answer.

"He had a long, rough night," Red Egan said. "He could be sleeping through the phone."

"Let's go wake him," said Uncle George.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The two men drove to Martin Twinam's house next to the Morgan Company. The area was surrounded by a high wire fence. As they started toward the front gate, Red Egan's hand closed on Uncle George's arm.

"Hold it, chum," the sheriff said.

Coming across the grass inside the fence was a powerful-looking Doberman.

"Twinam's guard dog," Red said. "He's supposed to be penned up in the daytime. He'd tear us to pieces if we went in there. Touch that gate and he'll let the whole neighborhood know."

The dog kept coming toward them. The animal was whimpering.

Uncle George's face hardened. "I'm going in," he said, reaching for the gate.

"Not me," Red said. Then: "Wait till I go back to the car and get my gun."

"You won't need it," Uncle George said. He opened the gate and went in. The dog made a yipping sound and scampered away across the grass to the rear door of the house. Uncle George followed him. Outside the door, the dog stood whining. Uncle George reached down and touched his shiny black head. "Easy, boy," he said.

He knocked on the door. No answer. He tried the door, found it unlocked, and walked in, the dog at his heels. Sprawled on the kitchen floor was Martin Twinam, the side of his head blown open by a gunshot wound, a gun gripped in his right hand. Uncle George didn't have to be told that the man was beyond help, long dead. He went to the door and called out to Red Egan to get in fast. Red came, the whimpering dog paying no attention to him.

"The crazy fool killed himself!" he said.

"Take a good close look, Red," said Uncle George. "This was a man used to handling a gun. Look at the gun in his hand. Do you think a man experienced with guns would pull the trigger with his middle finger?"

The State Troopers came. Cameras flashed and clicked. Fingerprint people began going over the house from top to bottom. The gun was Twinam's, registered and licensed in his name.

Uncle George's observation about the wrong finger being used to pull the trigger didn't seem to impress Captain Purdy. "A man in some kind of psychotic state fooling around with a gun—it could have gone off by accident, I suppose. Perhaps not intentional suicide, but certainly self-inflicted."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Uncle George found himself edging away from the center of activity.

"I've got that girl up in the tower," he told Red Egan.

"You sound angry," Red said.

"Come back up the mountain with me and maybe you'll see why."

"You got some lead?" Red asked.

"That Doberman told me everything," Uncle George said. "When we get to the tower, friend, stay out of sight—but *listen!*"

The men drove within a couple of hundred yards of the tower in Uncle George's jeep. The rest of the way was too rough even for that sturdy little vehicle.

George Crowder seemed frozen into some kind of cold anger and Red knew that was his cue for silence.

"Just stick around the fringes, Red," Uncle George said as they climbed out. "I don't want Marilyn Twinam to see you."

Joey and Timmy were where Uncle George had left them.

"I was beginning to wonder if you were ever coming back," the boy said.

The bright early-afternoon sun reflected brilliantly on the girl in the blue dress at the top of the tower. "I tried talking to her, but she didn't want to talk," Joey said.

"Just sit tight while I have a go at it. Red Egan's over there in the brush. Don't be startled if you see him."

The setter was at Uncle George's side, licking his hand. Uncle George stroked his head. "Stay with Joey," he said, and walked toward the tower.

The girl saw him and came forward, gripping the rail around the upper balcony.

"Did you find him?" she called out.

"I found him," Uncle George said.

"Where?"

"You know as well as I do that he's in jail."

"How would I know that? I was waiting for him—"

"I think not," Uncle George interrupted. "I think you were with him outside the Morgan Company."

"But—"

"You were waiting outside while he cleaned out the cash box in the office. A little extra cash for the honeymoon," Uncle George said. "Your stepfather turned up a couple of hours ahead of schedule. You

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

couldn't warn Lewis. Twinam went in, caught Lewis in the act, held him at gun point, and called the cops."

"If that's what happened—I wasn't there!"

"You watched the police take Lewis away to the barracks. You waited there, trying to figure out what to do to save your man. You're not a very rational girl, Marilyn. Finally, you went to your father's house and let yourself in. The dog didn't bother you—you're one of the family, someone to protect."

"This is crazy, Mr. Crowder!"

"Eventually your stepfather came home and you had it out with him. He had to ease off Fred Lewis or you'd do something wild. I'm guessing this part, young lady. I think he took his gun out of his pocket and put it down on the kitchen table or the sideboard. Probably took off his jacket. It was a hot night. He tried to reason with you. He'd caught a thief red-handed. He'd always been right about Fred Lewis and he took no small pleasure in telling you that. You lost your temper, to put it mildly, grabbed the gun, and shot him in the head."

"No!"

"You tried to think how to cover it up and finally put the gun in his hand to make it look like a suicide. But you were clumsy. You put his middle finger in the trigger guard instead of the forefinger he'd have used if he'd fired the gun himself."

"That's not true!" The girl's voice was shrill.

"You had to figure out some way to help yourself and Fred. You and he had talked about the fact that I check this tower on Sundays. And you knew something else about me—you knew I was a sucker for anyone in trouble. It doesn't please me that you planned to use me to help cover a double crime."

"You can't prove one word of this!" the girl screamed.

"I don't have to prove it," Uncle George said. "But you're going to have to prove that it isn't so." He turned and snapped his fingers. "Let's go, Timmy."

The girl began to shout profanities. Uncle George joined Red Egan at the edge of the clearing.

"You going to let her jump?" Red asked.

"She won't jump," Uncle George said. "She's too greedy for life not to take the chance of finding a way out."

"One question," said Red Egan. "You said the Doberman told you the whole story."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Uncle George reached down and scratched Timmy behind his floppy ears.

"He didn't raise an alarm when he should have. That's because the girl was his friend. He didn't attack us when we went there this morning because he had a problem he couldn't handle. He let us in because he needed help. His master needed help."

"Will she get away with it, George?"

"I don't know. But you can rest assured I can't be played for a sucker twice in one day," Uncle George said. "She'll have to get help somewhere else." He put his hand on his nephew's shoulder. "Let's get down the hill, boy."

Joey looked back at the tower. "She must be awfully provoked," he said.

Red Egan choked on a sudden burst of laughter.

"Q"

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. Title of Publication: Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Publication No. 00136328. 2. Date of Filing: October 1, 1985. 3. Frequency of Issue: Every 28 Days; (A) No. of Issues Published Annually: 13; (B) Annual Subscription Price: $19.50.

4. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers (not Printers): 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

6. Names and Address of Publisher, Editor and Managing Editor; Publisher: Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017; Editor: Eleanor Sullivan, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017; Managing Editor: Eleanor Sullivan, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

7. Owner: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017; Davis Communications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017; Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

8. Known Bondholders, Mortgages and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None.

10. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months; (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 319,814; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 22,898; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 227,091: (C) Total Paid Circulation: 249,989: (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means: Samples, Complimentary and Other Free Copies: 1,287; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 251,276: (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 7,016; (2) Returns from News Agents: 61,522; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 319,814.

Actual Number Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date; (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 327,943; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 23,000; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 240,892; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 263,892; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means: Samples, Complimentary and Other Free Copies: 1,280; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 265,172; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 7,016; (2) Returns from News Agents: 55,755; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 327,943.

I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

PRISCILLA GARSTON
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR, SUBSCRIPTIONS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Keith Jenkins story by

JANE BOSWORTH

In her cover letter with this second story in her new series about New Zealand drifter Keith Jenkins, Jane Bosworth wrote, "Keith Jenkins has related to me a mystery based upon an actual capture of an English ship in 1809. He has touched upon a clash of cultures which ripped New Zealand apart during the early 1800s . . ."

ME ORIANA'S JULIA

by JANE BOSWORTH

Were there blue-green stars in the sky
The night of your final good-bye?
Dear Julia, me maiden so shy,
Did he kiss you and then let you die?

Me inner voice kept toying with the rhyme, repeating it over and over until me emotions roller-coastered along it, gliding from pity to sadness and down into the angry depths of hatred. All this for a woman I'd never met. For me Oriana's Julia . . .

Oriana de Marion was a woman who stepped into your life and kicked it upside down. She was more than beautiful. She was queenly. Her deep-blue eyes and anglican features were set in skin the color of milky tea and framed by jet black hair that flowed past her waist. In her was the perfect intermingling of New Zealand Maori and pakeha settler blood. Her only flaw was a Hei-Tiki tattooed on the palm of her right hand. I slipped me hand over the face of that god when she offered meself her hand.

"Mr. Jenkins," she said, "I understand you find missing persons. For a fee, of course."

"I do. Miss—?"

© 1985 by Jane Bosworth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oriana de Marion."

She freed herself from me grip and settled into the tattered chair beside me desk. I stared at her, taking in as much as I could. There was a natural flush to her cheeks and her lips held a Mona Lisa promise. It was that smile made meself aware that she was appraising meself more thoroughly than I had done to her. She was a woman who used her beauty shrewdly.

"Perhaps," she said. "You *could* find Julia."

"I've no doubt of it."

"My sister Julia is dead, Mr. Jenkins."

She had said that without blinking an eye or altering the tone of her voice.

Callous, the word rang in me mind. Controlled.

"The tribe of Marion," she continued, "has maintained a burial ground for six hundred years. Julia belongs there. I want her found and brought home."

Nary a tear for her poor, dead sister, the thought crept through me mind. Is she the heiress whose fortune rests upon the missing body? "How did Julia die?" I asked her.

"I—don't know."

I seen a tic begin quivering beneath her left eye. Like the epicenter of a tiny earthquake, it began reaching out to undermine her calm. She clenched her hands to whiteness and bit down on her lower lip.

"Then how do you know she is dead?" I asked.

"I just—know," she answered. Tears welled in her eyes. She took a tissue from her purse and dabbed at them. She fisted her hand and pounded it into her right thigh. "I will not lose control," she told herself.

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Julia was painfully shy," she said. "Presenting herself for a job interview, even for maid work at the Waitomo Caves Hotel, was a terror for her. The day she was to meet Miss Hopstead at the hotel, she was shaking. She wouldn't have left that job. Someone else packed up her things and emptied out her room in back of the hotel. Because she'd been seen with a man by the name of Johnathan Whitmore, who is also gone, the county police refuse to consider foul play. Julia's just another runaway to them. Will you help me, Mr. Jenkins?"

"I'll try."

She handed me an envelope that had five one-hundred-dollar notes and a picture of Julia in it. She rose to go.

"If you need anything else," she said, "you can reach me at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rotorua International Hotel. My dance troupe is doing a hangi there."

She left me office and I remembered where I'd seen her before. Her picture was on page one of the *New Zealand News* under the headline DAUGHTER OF LOCAL CHIEF RETURNS FROM ROUND THE WORLD CULTURAL TOUR. The story beneath it included the bloody history of the tribe of Marion.

In 1809, they made the mistake of dining on the crew of the *H.M.S. Boyd* and then setting the ship afire. Most of the tribe was hunted down and slaughtered. Those who survived became outcasts, driven from place to place like a pack of lepers. Today they dance for tourists at buffets called hangis.

I packed me things, locked up me office flat, and made me way downstairs to me car. As I drove to Waitomo Caves, me mind kept toying with images. Oriana de Marion had fallen through a trapdoor in me mind and landed, beyond me reach, on a stage of me own imaginings.

"Dreamer," me inner voice chided, "bloody, dreaming ratbag. Shake it off, Keith Jenkins. Woman like that ain't for the likes of you."

"Not for me, eh?" I shot back. "What the hell's wrong with dreaming?"

I settled back behind the wheel and told meself not to let me dreaming interfere with me driving.

The Waitomo Caves Hotel sits on a knoll overlooking a valley. She's a rambling Victorian building with brass and crystal trappings. I parked under her gingerbread awning, inquired within for Melva Hopstead, and was told I could find her at the museum back down the road.

I found Miss Melva inside the museum scrubbing chunder off what looked like a pile of rocks stacked up against one wall. A closer look revealed a crawlhole marked Cave Entrance cut into the rocks.

" 'Ad a nipper get 'isself stuck inside where the cave makes a sharp left turn," Miss Melva said. " 'E's sick by the time the curator yanked 'im free. Unloaded 'is breakfast, 'e did."

"You Melva Hopstead?" I asked.

She dropped her brush in her bucket and fisted her hands to the side of her massive hips. Her eyes took in all of me and a scowl made her fat face ugly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I ain't hiring out to clean up no crib* after blokes what get planted on their holidays," she snapped.

"I ain't asking you to."

"Then state your business. I got me work to do."

I give her a picture of Julia. Her eyes moved from the picture to the crawlhole and back again. A sigh lifted her bosom and let it fall again.

"I been hired out to find the girl," I said.

"Poor lamb," she said. "Poor, dumb lamb, letting a ocher like 'im lead 'er round by the nose. 'Im dragging 'er down here, making 'er crawl into 'at bloody hole and then blocking the entrance so's she'd have to crawl on through. 'Er, who's afeared a closed-in places. She'd come out pale and trembling, soaked to the skin in 'er own sweat—and 'e'd make her do it all over again. Took 'er spelunking, 'e did, on the day they run off. Was McFarady that done the guiding."

"Where do I find this McFarady?" I asked.

"Third 'ouse up on the right. Behind the museum. Jus' twixt the two a us, I don't think 'at ocher was a barrister. 'E 'ad hands softer than a baby's bottom, 'e did. And 'is body was muscled from hard work. I'd bet me last note 'e was a shearer. Tis sheep's lanolin 'at softens a bloke's hands, and tis shearing 'at hardens 'is body."

I thanked her and walked to McFarady's house. I found him sitting at his kitchen table drinking wine from a plastic cup. What was left of a fish-and-chips dinner was drawing flies to the table. An empty liter of wine sat on the floor beside his feet. I set me picture of Julia on the table and watched his eyes widen in recognition. He scratched the stubble on his cheeks and then wrapped his fingers around the cup. "What do you want?" he asked.

"Julia de Marion."

The color drained from his cheeks and he tightened his fingers round the cup.

"Don't 'ave her," he said.

"She's dead," I kept me voice low and even. "I come for her body."

The glass popped in his hands, spilling what was left of the wine on the table. He looked from the wine to meself and back again. He fisted his head in his hands and groaned. "You ain't gonna find her body," he said. "It got washed down into the earth. Ain't nobody gonna find that girl. I never shoulda brung her down there, but the barrister, he—" The words snagged in his throat and he choked. His

**cabin*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyes were sick and hopeless like the eyes of a hunter snared in his own trap.

"I ain't a constable," I told him.

He backhanded the sweat from his forehead and stared into me eyes. "Don't matter none if you were," he said. "Sumthin' like this, it eats away at a man, like a bloody worm inside me bowels. Was the barrister told meself to keep mum. Told me he'd tell the police was me that killed her. 'Who'd they believe?' he asked. 'A barrister like meself or a coot that earns his notes grubbing around in the underground?' I can't keep still, no more.

"The girl, she started whimpering as soon as we went into the cave, jus' like a frightened puppy. I wanted to go back, but the barrister'd have none of that. Said the girl was gonna see them glowworms down there. So we kept going. By the time we reached the grotto with its slow-moving river, the girl was crying. The barrister, he grabbed hold of her, pulled her close, and kissed her. Then he told her, 'Julia, look at the blue-green stars in the sky.'

"I seen her open her eyes and stare at them glowworms' lights. I seen her mouth the word 'stars' over and over again, but it weren't no use. The walls was closing in on her, sucking the breath right out of her. I'd seen it before and I knew I had to get her out of there before she retreated into herself to a place where no one would ever reach her again.

"Downstream and across the river, there's a passage leading to the outside. Early explorers strung cable across the river there. No one ever uses it because as the river narrows the current picks up and two meters below the cable the river falls underground and disappears. But we used that cable, meself in the lead, the girl in the center, the barrister bringing up the rear. When we was a little more than halfway across, I felt a tug on me arm and looked back to see the barrister and the girl struggling. He had a hold of the cable with one hand and the girl's shirt collar in the other. He just let go of her and she was swept away. Why would he do that? She was such a bonnie little thing."

Why, indeed? The question augered into me mind. A barrister who's a shearer takes a claustrophobic girl into the underground. He pulls her hands off a cable and lets her go in the current of an underground river. Why? Me mind would never let me rest until I knew the answer to that question.

I left McFarady to his nightmares and drove to Rotorua to look

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for Oriana de Marion. I found her sitting alone inside a Maori Meeting House in the thermal area the pakeha call Whaka. It had rained the day before and steam was rising from the ground and seeping into the building through cracks in the wooden flooring. I sat beside her and met her questioning gaze.

"Julia was murdered," I told her. "Do you have any idea why someone would do that?"

Her breath caught in her throat and she fixed her eyes on the grotesque faces carved into the support beam to her right.

"Where is her body?" she asked.

No tears, me inner voice said. No shock. Not even anger. You've been duped, Keith Jenkins.

"Julia was swept beneath the earth into an underground river," I said. "Her boy friend had a hold of her and just let the current take her. Why would he do that, Oriana?"

Her eyes met mine. I saw confusion, pain, anger. Then understanding drifted across her face. "She must have told him," she said.

She rose to go and I jerked her back down.

"My people will take care of this," she said. "It no longer concerns you."

"You best think twice about that, Oriana," I could not mask the anger in me voice. "You ain't been straight with me. I ain't shifting on 'til I know why."

"My people—"

"To hell with your people. You set me to mucking about in murder and I want to know why."

She looked at me with an indignity which fueled me anger. I wanted to shake the truth from her lips.

"What is the murderer's name?" she asked.

"Johnathan Whitmore, the bloke she'd been chumming with. Now, tell me what he was after."

"I cannot, Mr. Jenkins. Like Julia, I've been sworn to secrecy. Can you pilot a plane?"

"I have me license."

"Good. Our Johnathan Whitmore should be found at the Hermitage Hotel on the South Island. My dance troupe leases a Cessna that you can fly to Mt. Cook. Someone will meet you there. If you find Johnathan Whitmore, then you will also find out why Julia was killed."

She left me stranded on a peak of curiosity—knowing full well that the only path down would lead me straight to Julia's murderer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Will you be wanting the plane, Mr. Jenkins?" she asked.
"Yes, Miss de Marion."

The sun had sunk into the Tasman Sea by the time I landed at Mt. Cook Airport. A Maori lad of about sixteen met me at the airport and drove me to the hotel. The hotel had sent him, he told me. He knew nothing of Oriana de Marion. He dropped me in front of the hotel and I walked inside to the desk. They was a room waiting for me on the second floor, west wing. I went to me room, sat at me table, and stared through the window at a sky full of stars. I peeled and ate the kiwi fruit on me table. Then I laid down on me bed to rest and fell asleep.

The high-pitched screams of a kea bird followed by a man's curses jerked me awake. The sun was rising and I seen the bird perched on the railing of me balcony. The bloody bugger had what looked like a large gold coin in its beak. I took me kiwi peelings, made me way to me door, opened it, and eased toward the parrot. I tossed a peeling on me balcony and the bird flew down for it, dropping the coin on me decking. It ate it and screamed for more. I tossed the peelings over the railings and the parrot flew after them.

I picked up the round object he'd left behind. It looked like a thin watchface that had an invisible equator line cutting loose a top set of Roman numerals from the cardinal numerals that orbited them. Below the Roman numerals, the name Barraud of London and the date 1807 were etched into the gold. I had no idea what it was I held in me hand. I poked me head round the partition separating meself from me neighbor and offered up me treasure to him.

"The bloody parrot left this behind," I said. "Is it yours?"

He was a tall chap, muscled about the arms—about thirty.

He plucked it from me hand.

"Bloody thief," he snarled. "I set it down and the bird come in and took it."

"What is it?" I asked.

"The face of a pocket chronometer. Sailors used 'em for navigation. It's me good-luck piece. Thanks."

He offered up his hand and I shook it. His skin was soft.

"You here on holiday?" I asked.

"Yes. I'm a barrister in need of fresh air and exercise."

He turned toward his door and I eased back down onto me balcony. I looked down at the space between our partition and the decking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and seen that me neighbor was still outside. What's he waiting for? I asked meself.

"Tis sheep's lanolin 'at softens a bloke's hands," Miss Melva's words floated into me mind. "Tis shearing 'at hardens his body."

Idiot, me inner voice chided. You've been as dense as a bloody mug. The answer to your riddle is next door.

I stepped over me railing and swung meself round the partition to his balcony. He stood there eyeing meself. "Keith Jenkins is me name," I said. "Julia de Marion sent me."

"Step inside, Mr. Jenkins," he said, "and we'll talk about Julia."

I followed him inside. The door swung closed behind meself and I felt the nose of a gun nuzzle into the center of me back. To me left, a Maori man was sorting pewter bowls spread atop a twin bed. The words *H.M.S. Boyd* was etched inside the bowls. Near the foot of the bed beside a handful of gold guineas was a silver bleeding bowl with *H.M.S. Resolution* stamped into its side.

Captain Cook, the name rang in me mind. But how did it? And then I remembered me history lessons. It was common practice for ships at sea to exchange needed items. How many times had this bowl been exchanged before it became part of the booty the tribe of Marion took off the *Boyd?*

Me white host seen me staring at the bowl and he sneered. "It's worth a bloody fortune on the black market," he said. "Julia give me a map, she did. She'll be pleased to know I found the treasure."

"Julia de Marion was murdered," I said.

I felt the gun in me back jerk against me shoulder blades and I closed me mind to the shot I was sure would ring out. Instead, I was shoved forward. I stumbled to a halt and turned to see a look of pure hatred on the gentle features of the Maori with the gun. His eyes settled on me white host and the hatred melted away. Me host narrowed his eyes upon meself.

"You'll be coming with us, Mr. Jenkins," he said.

The treasure was gunnysacked and meself, me host, and the two Maori men trekked out of the hotel to a waiting car below. I was sandwiched between the two Maoris in the back seat while me host drove to the Mt. Cook Airport, where a Pilatus Porter with skies above the wheels was warming up on the runway. Me host hurried us into it. Again I was sandwiched between the two Maoris, this time in the first seats behind the pilot. The gunnysack sat in the aisle between the sliding door and the seats. Me white host strapped hisself into the pilot's seat.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why the skies on the plane?" I asked him.

"Geographical ignorance," he answered. "I thought the mountain known to the Maori as the Mountain of the Gods was Mt. Tasman. I've been landing on the Tasman Glacier. Then yesterday afternoon I met up with me Maori mates here and they set me straight about which mountain was on Julia's map. It was Sefton. I hired them out to guide me to the cave."

Me white host cleared us for takeoff, set the nose of the plane toward Mt. Cook, and roared down the runway. We lifted off, banked right, and flew up the gravel-and-ice desolation known as Hooker Valley. The plane lifted up and over a set of rugged snow-capped peaks and skirted the snow-covered ice of the Tasman Glacier. Where the snow had falled off jagged edges, the aqua-blue ice shown forth. We crested Mt. Haidinger and began a slow wide circle over the Franz Joseph Glacier. When we were nearing the glacier's icy tongue, me white host shouted for the side door to be opened.

"This is where you get off, Jenkins," he yelled as the Maori on me right slid open the door.

A deafening burst of icy wind invaded the cabin. I could see the plane's shadow skimming over thousands of icy hills that cut their way to the Tasman Sea. I tried to move and the cold, hard nose of a gun in me left temple froze me body to the seat. Me stomach did a free fall in anticipation of what lay ahead. I seen the wind ruffling the hair of the Maori beside the door and I got to thinking how absurd it was to have that as me last rememberance.

Goodbye, Ellie, me mind reached out to me sister. Goodbye, Ellie. —Hullo. What's this?

The Maori beside the door grabbed hold of the gunnysack and flung it out the door. Then he made his way forward and shouted into me host's ear. Me host grabbed hold of a lever and began pumping it back and forth. Then he looked out his window.

He'd lowered the skies.

The bloody coot's gonna land, I thought. On the bloody snow with only the altimeter to tell him how close he is to the glacier.

Me white host banked the plane left, lowered her flaps, and set her down on the snow-covered ice. A reverse engine-thrust brought us to a gliding stop. He shut down the engine, stood, walked aft, and shoved the Maori out the door. "Bloody idiot!" he shouted. "You ain't coming back without that sack!"

He jumped down into the snow and turned toward meself and me

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gun-toting friend in the next seat. "If Jenkins so much as breathes different," he said, "shoot him."

As the two men plodded off toward the glacial iceflow, I felt a release of pressure on me left temple. The gun had been removed. Then a hand positioned itself in front of me eyes and opened up. I seen the smiling face of a Hei-Tiki tattooed to its palm. Me Maori mate stood, brushed past me, and jumped out the open door. "Fly the plane out of here," he ordered me. "Get rid of it. My cousin and I will do what will satisfy Oriana. We'll walk back to the Hermitage."

He closed the door and set out after the other two men. By the time I was airborne, he had caught up with them. I looked down and seen me white host cutting a trail for the two who followed. They were trekking into a no man's land of shifting ice which chasms and then closes in upon itself.

I flew across the island to a lonely bay on Bank's Peninsula. There, I pulled the plane's nose up into stall speed and let her float down into the water. Like a huge white dragonfly, she settled in, belly deep. I opened the side door, dove into the water, and swam to shore. I sat there watching me dragonfly sink out of sight. Then I walked to a gravel road and made me way along it until an outbacker come along and give me a lift into Christchurch. Twenty-four hours later I was inside Oriana de Marion's suite at the Rotorua International.

Like a caged leopard, Oriana paced the floor in front of me. She didn't like me line of questioning.

"What happened to Johnathan Whitmore?" I asked.

She halted and locked eyes with meself. That Mona Lisa smile crept onto her lips. "I ain't leaving 'til I know," I said.

"He's a permanent part of the glacier," she said. "Something to be ground into tiny shards of flesh and bone. A thing best forgotten."

"How did he become part of the ice, Oriana?"

She shed a look of pure disgust on meself. In it I seen an unmistakeable warning. She walked to the door and opened it. I seen a bagboy glance in and then walk on.

"Let's just say he fell," she said. "Poor man tumbled into an ice chasm much too deep for rescue. Into the earth with Julia."

There was no pain in her voice. No pity. Just cold, hard satisfaction. Svelte, the word rang out in me mind. Cunning. Dangerous. Like an animal to be admired but never petted.

Want to tame her? me inner voice taunted.

She did not have to ask me to leave.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Bohannon story by

JOSEPH HANSEN

"The Tango Bear," Joseph Hansen's first story about Hack Bohannon, owner of a boarding stable up a rugged canyon on California's central coast and a licensed private investigator, appeared in the Mid-December 1984 issue of EQMM. This second story in the series will also be included in an anthology edited by John Ball and Jon L. Breen under the sponsorship of the Southern California chapter of the Mystery Writers of America.

"It happened in the dark," the young deputy said. "His lights were on. The doc said the body temp makes it somewhere around midnight when he died. Maybe he was lost. But why come so far to get lost?"

Bohannon said, "Maybe somebody lied to him."

"A snipe hunt?" Gerard said. "I'll ask at the savings and loan. I'll ask his wife . . ."

SNIPE HUNT

by JOSEPH HANSEN

Outside, on the long covered boardwalk that fronted the ranch house, a cat clawed the aluminum frame of the screen door. It was morning. The wooden door stood open. Good smells filled the kitchen—of coffee, of sputtering sausage and slabs of cornmeal mush turning golden in castiron skillets. But it wasn't the hope of food that brought the cat. Something glittery dangled from his jaws. He was a big black-and-white tom cat with massive jowls and clear, indifferent, yellow eyes.

"Should have named that cat Magpie."

Stubbs said this, a stocky ex-rodeo rider gone white in the whis-

© 1985 by Joseph Hansen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kers. He came hobbling to the big deal table with plates of food he set in front of Hack Bohannon—owner of this place, a boarding stable up a rugged canyon on California's central coast—and Rivera, a slender, dark youngster studying for the priesthood at a seminary on a nearby ridge who helped Bohannon out part-time.

"Or Pack Rat," Stubbs added and went back to the stately white-enamel-and-nickelplate cookstove for his own breakfast and a platter of sourdough biscuits. "No—Magpie. Them's his colors, same as the birds." He plunked down the plates, scraped chair legs on smooth planks, and sat down. His blue eyes took in Bohannon's plate. "Right. Sunny side up on the eggs again. I told you, it's the only way I know how." He took a biscuit in arthritic fingers, broke it open, buttered it. "Never claimed to be a chef. Just a chuckwagon cook is all. You want it fancy, cook it yourself, Hack."

"I will," Bohannon said. He often did. He filled his mouth with sausage, egg, fried mush, washed these down with coffee, and rose to go open the screen door. The cat came inside and dropped the glittery thing with a small rattle at Bohannon's feet. It was a wristwatch. Free of it, the cat was able to make a few remarks, and it made them. Bohannon smiled, said, "Thank you. Very nice, right." He bent, gave the sleek black-and-white back a couple of strokes, and picked up the watch. On the face of the watch was printed *Cartier*. Expensive. The cat crossed the room and jumped up easily onto the counter beside the stove, to stick its head out and sniff at the hot pans there. Bohannon went back to the table, sat down, laid the watch next to his plate. It was undamaged. The time was *right*—ten past six. Bristles of dry grass were caught in the reticulated metal band.

"A nice watch," Rivera said.

"How far does he go, collecting things?" Bohannon asked.

Rivera's slight shoulders moved. "Not far, I don't think."

"He likes his comforts too much," Stubbs said. "He sticks around the stables mostly. Sleeps."

"He thinks he is a horse," Rivera said with a smile.

Bohannon doubted it. Eating now, drinking coffee, he watched the cat jump down from the counter and come to the table. He stood looking up first at Stubbs, who ignored him, then at Rivera, who shook his head, then at Bohannon, who nodded. The cat sprang lightly into his lap. Bohannon broke off a bit of sausage and set it between the cat's teeth. The cat growled as if someone was threatening to take the food away from him and jumped down on the floor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to eat it, still growling, shaking his head as if he had a mouse in his jaws. "He knows he's a cat," Bohannon said, "and he wouldn't have it any other way. I've got a theory. It explains the mystery of Man. Cats invented Man to look after them."

"I will tell the Monsignor," Rivera said. "He has been giving us the wrong information."

"—Feed them, shelter them, keep them out of trouble," Bohannon said. He frowned and turned the watch over. Initials were engraved on its back. "T.K.," he said and looked at Stubbs's ruddy face, and Rivera's smooth, brown one. "Mean anything to you?"

"Had a Mrs. T.K. here the other day," Stubbs said. "Rented Seashell and Mousie for a morning's ride. Young fellow with her she says was her nephew, but she didn't look at him like a nephew. Mrs. Thomas Kruger. She didn't give me the boy's name."

"The first time?" Bohannon asked.

"First time with him," Stubbs said, "but she's been up before. Mostly with women her own age, women friends. Middle forties. New little red roadster. Rich women. Time on their hands. Lunch afterwards, I expect. Lots of margaritas."

"With the girls," Bohannon said. "Not with the nephew."

"No, she'd find something else to do with him," Stubbs said, "if memory serves me."

"I think"—Rivera pushed back his chair—"the conversation is slipping from its usual high spiritual plane here. There is work to do." He rose, smiling a little. "Among our speechless friends, the horses, who are God's innocents and will not trouble my mortal thoughts."

"Sorry about that," Bohannon said.

"Stay and offer a prayer for that nephew," Stubbs said. "Woman looked like a man eater to me."

"I will see you later." Rivera went down the room to the screen door. When he pushed it open, the cat slipped out between his boots. He followed it and the door rattled shut.

Stubbs sighed, belched softly, used his napkin. "Fine day. Wasn't for the annual giant community rummage sale and flea market in Madrone, we'd be busy. Maybe I'll run down there myself later. I could use a couple of new shirts." He rose, started off, paused, glanced back at Bohannon, and changed course. From a cupboard he took down a grey mottled cardboard file shaped like a shoebox and limped to the table with it. "Her number will be in here." Bohannon was pouring coffee. He nodded his thanks.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But no one answered the telephone at the number Mrs. Thomas Kruger had given Stubbs. Bohannon finished off his new mug of coffee and two more cigarettes, went to the wall phone and tried the number again. It rang in an empty house. Bohannon went along a knotty-pine hallway to a plank bedroom where Rivera had earlier made up the poster bed under its patchwork quilt, as he made the beds up every day. Bohannon pulled on socks and boots, checked the kitchen stove to see that Stubbs had turned off oven and burners—he sometimes forgot—then went out into the bright morning and his pickup.

The cat, in fact, went far afield. Bohannon clattered the old GM along a lot of dusty back trails and side canyons before he caught a glint of metal down among brush in a barranca sheltered by big old oaks. He braked, climbed out, slammed the door with a clang that echoed in the stillness, and—slipping, sliding, scraping hands and the seat of his britches—followed the slurred swath a car had made chuting down here.

It was a red European sportscar of some kind that looked new. It rested on its top, wheels up. Bohannon crouched to see inside. Nobody. He straightened up and looked around. All he saw was dry brush and drier rock bleaching in a stream bed that wouldn't run with water until winter, when it would run hard and deep. Boots crunching rock, he circled the car, squinting against stabs of sunlight down through the dusty trees. A lizard scuttled away, claws whispering agitation in the stillness. It scampered over a shoe. Bohannon went for this, picked it up, saw a second shoe—and this one had a foot in it. A stout, grey-haired man in a pricey tweed jacket and wool trousers sprawled face down among boulders like something broken and thrown away. He had leaked blood, and flies buzzed around. Bohannon crouched and touched a hand. It was cold. He climbed back to his pickup and used the two-way radio there.

Brown sheriff's-department cars stood in a loose row along the back road half an hour later. Also a brown ambulance, a converted van with a row of lights along its top and an electroplated howler that glittered in the sun. Men in chalky lightweight jumpsuits toiled up the slope with the body of Thomas Kruger in a zippered bag on a gurney with its shiny tubular metal legs folded. Deputies in crisp suntans nosed around the red car, took photographs, used a steel tape for measurements.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It took Bohannon back to where he had no wish to be any more. He'd been a deputy for fourteen years and loved it, and then had come to hate it and had quit. Because people kept coming to him for help, he held a private investigator's license now, but he wished they would stop coming, would forget about him, leave him alone. He was content with the horses—for the same reason as Rivera, he supposed. They were innocent. Human beings were rarely that—himself least of all.

"Lieutenant?" A young deputy with freckles called from beside the car. The call went echoing down the canyon. Someplace far off, as if answering, a crow cawed, and another. The man beside Bohannon grunted and went skidding, teetering down to the freckled kid. The man was Gerard. Bohannon had worked with him for a long time and they had been friends—until Gerard was part of a whitewash that let an officer get away with shooting dead an unarmed latino boy in Cayucas. Now they were civil when they met, but that was the extent of it.

Bohannon followed Gerard. The young deputy said, "I don't think it was an accident, sir. It looks to me like the brakes were tampered with. A slow leak in the line. Back at the garage, we'll be able to tell for sure."

"Somebody wanted him to drive off the road?"

"I'd say so." Up on the road, the doors of the ambulance slammed. The kid lifted his head, squinting in the sun glare. "Yes, sir."

"It's a stupid plan for murder," Bohannon said. "Too much could go wrong. Why would someone try it?"

Gerard shrugged. "Money? He was well off. Senior vice-president of Mountain Savings and Loan."

"What was he doing driving up here?" Bohannon asked.

"Looking at land?" Gerard wondered.

"It happened in the dark," the young deputy said. "His headlights were on. The doc said the body temp makes it someplace around midnight when he died."

"Not looking at land," Gerard said, and turned to Bohannon. "You know all these canyons. What's here, who's here?"

"Nothing and nobody," Bohannon said. "And he wasn't heading over the ridge for Atascadero or Paso Robles. Not on this road. Anyway, he was pointed back. Only it would take him a hell of a lot of chopping and changing to get there."

"Maybe he was lost." The young deputy wiped sweat off his forehead with a hand. "But why come so far to get lost?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bohannon said, "Maybe somebody lied to him."

"A snipe hunt?" Gerard said. "I'll ask at the savings and loan. I'll ask his wife."

"She's not home," Bohannon said. "I tried the number twice this morning."

Gerard frowned. "You knew who he was before you even found him? You want to explain?"

"My cat brought this in at breakfast time." Bohannon dug the watch out of a frayed Levi pocket and laid it in Gerard's hand. "His initials are on the back. Stubbs took a stab at guessing what they stood for. His wife rides my horses sometimes."

"Why would she lose his watch for him?" Gerard said.

"Exactly what I asked myself," Bohannon said.

"You found the answer," Gerard said. He ventured a smile, and in a country-western twang repeated something they used to say to one another when they'd worked together young. "You done good, son."

Bohannon kept his face stiff, and felt sad and angry. There was no use in Gerard's trying, even less use in Bohannon's encouraging him. It could only be fake now. Up on the road a truck engine rumbled, gears clashed. Bohannon winced and peered upward. The wrecker had arrived to winch the pretty little red car out of the barranca. He said, "I don't think that's his car. I think it's hers." He started up the steep slope, rubble rattling down behind him with each step. "Let me know what happens."

But it wasn't Gerard who let him know what happened. It was a very young woman in baggy white-sheeting pant and jacket yards too big for her, a Union 76 blue-and-orange globe printed on her T-shirt, and panic in her eyes. He was waiting under the overhang of the white-and-green stable building while a young father leaned against the wall, writing him a check for riding lessons given. It was late afternoon. The kids seemed relieved the lesson was over. They were about nine or ten. The blond one had grabbed the dark one's hat and was running and dodging with it, and jeering.

Out in the yard, with its white rail fences, flower beds, and shaggy old eucalyptus trees throwing long shadows, the girl had hopped out of a new compact and was talking shrilly to Rivera, pushing at her crazily cropped pale hair and waving her arms. The young father tore the check out of its folder, handed it to Bohannon with a wan smile, pushed the folder away, and went to collect his boys. Bohan-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

non tucked the check into a shirt pocket. Rivera pointed and the girl came running to Bohannon—jogging shoes, no socks. "You have to help me," she panted. "You have to."

Bohannon took down a bucket from a nail beside a box-stall door. "Why me?" He walked away with the bucket.

She ran alongside him. "Mr. Fitzmaurice said you would."

"Archie?" Bohannon bent to a tap and turned the valve. Water splashed into the bucket. "Are you his client?"

She shook her head. "Melanie Kruger—that bitch."

Bohannon glanced at her. He turned off the tap and set the bucket down. "Mrs. Thomas Kruger?"

The young woman nodded. She licked her lips and eyed the water in the bucket. "They arrested her. At the rummage sale. For killing her husband. Last night."

Bohannon frowned. That was fast, wasn't it? He said, "But you call her a bitch, so it isn't her you want help for—her and Archie."

"No, it's Dennis," she wailed. "Dennis Toomy."

Bohannon couldn't stop a small smile. "Would that be her nephew? The one she came here with the other morning?"

"Her nephew!" She scoffed. "Is that what she said? Oh, wow. What a hypocrite."

"There was a husband." Bohannon took a dipper off a hook, plunged it into the bucket, brought it up filled, offered it to her. "Thirsty?" She took the long handle and drank, water dribbling off her chin, darkening the 76 globe between her pert little breasts. She handed back the dipper and wiped her chin with a hand. Bohannon hung the dipper up again above the tap. "If he isn't her nephew, what is he?"

"A graduate student at Davis—an arboriculturist. Trees, all right? And when she drove in for gas the other day, Mrs. Kruger told me about her oaks dying, and I said maybe Dennis could help her, okay? So she called the University, and he went, didn't he? And what does she do? Invite him in. For lunch. Oh, sure, for lunch." Hurt and disgust were in her voice.

Bohannon's mouth twitched. "Those things happen. It's his age. And hers. Don't take it too hard."

"I'm liberated," she said. "But it wasn't just once. He kept going back. She gave him presents. He's a poor boy. A Rolex watch, gold chains, a camera? Why wouldn't he?"

"Not for love?" Bohannon said.

She stared, outraged. "Have you seen her? She's old."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He left you for her," Bohannon said.

"I'm not jealous," she said stoutly. "Is that what you think? Well, you're wrong." An old bay gelding called Bearcat put his head out over the closed lower half of his stall door and nibbled at her puffy windbreaker. She jumped. "Hey!"

Bearcat, who had a sense of humor, lifted his head, curled his upper lip over long yellow teeth, and nickered. Bohannon laughed and led her two steps out of the horse's reach. Then he held the water bucket up and, shaggy black mane falling into his eyes, Bearcat drank—noisily, splashily. The young woman said, "I just hated seeing her using him. I knew it would lead to trouble. I went and begged her to leave him alone. She sneered at me. Now look what's happened."

Bohannon set the bucket down. Bearcat grabbed his hat by its brim. Bohannon grabbed it back, grinning, and gave the big soft muzzle a push. "Get in there and behave yourself," he said. And to the young woman, "What has happened?"

"They've arrested him, too. They say she paid him to murder her husband." She waved her small hands. "But he didn't do it, Mr. Bohannon. He couldn't."

Bohannon's brows rose mildly. "Paraplegic?"

"Stop that. Of course not. But he's not that kind of boy. I've known him all my life. He's gentle. He can't hurt anything living. He wouldn't. Kill another human being? Never." She shook her head fiercely. "Never."

"The sheriff doesn't make arrests for murder without a reason. What's the reason?"

She stopped looking at him. She turned away to watch or pretend to watch Rivera helping an old couple down off horses. Both were rail-thin. They wore black Mexican outfits with silver braid, silver belts, silver bands around black gaucho hats. The saddles on their palominos were heavy with silver. Once the couple must have cut a dash, but they were frail and stiff in the joints now and Rivera had a time of it to keep them from breaking bones dismounting.

The young woman said glumly, "The sheriff has letters they wrote. And her check made out to Dennis. That he cashed."

"What kind of letters?" Bohannon said.

"What kind do you think?" she asked bitterly.

"I see." Bohannon sighed. "I don't see what I can do. It sounds open and shut to me. I'm sorry."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She turned to him sharply. "Don't say that. He didn't do it." Tears filled her eyes. "You have to help him."

"What's Mrs. Kruger doing?" Bohannon said. "Keeping Arch Fitzmaurice all to herself?"

"You better believe it," the young woman said.

"He'll have a public defender, then," Bohannon said. He touched the girl's shoulder. "Don't worry about it. If he didn't do it, it will come out at the trial."

She shrugged his hand away. "No, it won't. She'll blame it all on him. She'll say it was his idea." Her laugh was sour. "Haven't you ever heard about one law for the rich, one law for the poor? She'll get away, he'll go to death row."

"When you're older," Bohannon said, "you'll learn that things almost never turn out as badly as we fear."

"Don't patronize me," she said. "I tell you Dennis didn't do it. I know he didn't."

Bohannon looked away, over her tufty blonde head, past the yard where the shadows had stretched, purple on the yellow hardpan. A breeze had risen as it did about this time every day, bringing coolness and a smell of the sea. It rustled the high trees. Over the canyon rim, colors other than blue began to change the sky. Soon it would look like the inside of an abalone shell. Then it would streak with reds and, almost before you could blink, it would be black and strewn with stars.

He looked into her eyes. "What makes you so sure?"

She dropped her gaze and her voice. "I can't tell you." Then quickly she looked up again and gripped his arm. "But I am sure. I swear it. Will you help him—*please?*" She poked into a pocket of the blowsy white jacket and brought out a wallet. "I'll pay you. I have a job." She held out two twenties. "And I can always sell my car if I have to."

"Let's see if I'm any use first," Bohannon said. "What's your name? Where can I find you?"

"Billie Shears," she said, and gave a Madrone address.

Rivera looked wounded and shook his head. "Next time you must take one of us with you," he said. He dipped a fragment of fried tortilla into a big bowl of guacamole and stuffed his mouth with the green stuff. "You are an artist." Chewing, he nodded at Stubbs's drawings on the kitchen walls—horses mostly. When the weather was warm and dry and his joints weren't too stiff from arthritis and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

old breaks, Stubbs liked to draw and he did it well. "But you have no taste in clothes." Rivera washed down the food with orange soda. "That is a terrible shirt."

Stubbs worked at breaking long elastic strings of white Mexican cheese. Bohannon had fixed beef enchiladas with his own secret sauce and the cheese melted on top. Holding a forkful of enchilada high, Stubbs sawed at the strings of cheese with a knife. He glanced at Rivera. "For any man that can drink that stuff with perfectly good food to talk about taste," he said, "don't add up to much." He gave up, laid the knife down, stuffed his mouth, and wrangled the cheese strands in as best he could with the fork. He looked down at the shirt. "It's got all its buttons. It covers me up decent. What's wrong with it?"

"It makes you look like a sofa," Bohannon said.

Outside in the red sunset light, a car door slammed, steps sounded on the porch planks, a figure appeared at the screen door. Knuckles rattled the frame. "Hack?"

"Come in." Bohannon stood up and started for the stove. "You want supper? Enchiladas."

"They give me heartburn," Gerard said. "Thanks. My wife will be expecting me." While the screen door rattled shut behind him, he read his watch. "It's late. But I wanted to fill you in." He moved a chair out at the table and sat on it. "If you've got a beer around—"

Bohannon took down a glass and brought a brown bottle from the refrigerator. He set these in front of Gerard and resumed his place and his eating.

"I seen you arrest that Kruger woman," Stubbs said. "Right in the middle of the rummage sale she was running. Surprised hell out of folks. Even me."

"Oh, then it's not news," Gerard said. He tilted the glass and let beer run out of the bottle slowly into it. He regarded Bohannon. "What more do you want to know?"

"How come it happened so fast?" Bohannon said. "Did you settle on her first, or did you find those letters first?"

Gerard tasted his beer, wagged his head in appreciation, and read the label on the beer. "Anchor. It's still the best, isn't it?" He reached across, picked up the orange-soda bottle, shuddered, set it down again, and asked Rivera, "How can you drink that stuff?"

"It is an old Aztec tradition," Rivera said.

Gerard said to Bohannon, "The mail gets to my house about eight-thirty. A brown envelope was in the box and my wife noticed that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it didn't have any stamps on it. Also it seemed a little damp and the rest of the delivery didn't. As if it had been in the box all night. She phoned me about it and I sent a car around for it. It had these letters in it—from this Davis student, Dennis Toomy. I phoned the Davis police and they went around to ask questions of Toomy, and they found Melanie Kruger's letters to him. They fit together. They made a picture."

"Love letters?" Stubbs said.

"Love letters of a sort. Sex letters is more like it. But with a nasty turn to them. All about how wonderful the world would be for this twenty-three-year-old kid and this forty-five-year-old woman if only her husband was dead. She couldn't leave him, because he'd cut her off without a dime and she didn't have any money of her own. He wouldn't politely divorce her. It would disgrace him. So wouldn't it be nice if he met with some kind of fatal accident."

"No specifics?" Bohannon said.

"Better than that. A check for five hundred bucks. The D.A. is delighted. To any jury, the meaning has to be plain in the light of what happened to Kruger. He doesn't figure to have any trouble with it."

"Billie Shears is having trouble with it," Bohannon said.

"That pest," Gerard said. "Was she here, too?"

"She's very much in love with young Toomy."

"Yeah, well, love is blind." Gerard gulped his beer and filled the glass again. "How did she happen to hunt you up? What does she expect you to do?"

"Get the boy off," Bohannon said. "She must have pestered Archie Fitzmaurice and he sent her to me to get rid of her." He finished his enchiladas and laid down his fork. "Who left those letters in your box in the middle of the night?"

"Kruger himself," Gerard said. "We asked neighborhood dog-walkers. Heavyset, middle-aged, white-haired. Who else could it be? Before he drove off to die. Ironic, isn't it?"

"You said he didn't want a scandal," Stubbs said.

"If the county prosecuted her for conspiracy to commit murder," Gerard said, "what could he do about it? It wouldn't reflect on him—and it would punish hell out of her."

"If you want proof there is a God"—Rivera rose and went into gathering shadows to fetch the coffee pot from the stove—"just look at how miserably people act without Him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I want to talk to Toomy," Bohannon said. "Who's his public defender?"

"May," Gerard said. "Fat Freddie."

Madrone was a cluster of spindly jigsaw-work houses in foothills above the coast highway. The houses had been fixed up inside, and outside painted candy colors. A good many of them now housed antique stores, gift shops, small restaurants. The names were quaint and quaintly painted on swinging signboards. The sea wind creaked them a little tonight. He saw the gilt lettering spark through the drooping branches of fine old roadside pepper trees. Mainstreet had showed a lot of dull brick storefronts not long ago. Now these had been covered by cedar and redwood planking, so the street looked like a set for a western.

Bohannon made a face and rattled the old pickup onto the lighted tarmac beside the pale-brick sheriff's station. He parked in a slot reserved for official vehicles and pushed the heavy glass doors into the place grimly. He hated coming here, hated the smell of the place, the familiar sounds echoing down familiar hallways from familiar offices. The officer at the desk, with a padded phone at one ear and a slim tubular microphone at mouth level, was a dark young woman, slightly bucktoothed. She raised thick dark brows above lustrous eyes and sketched a smile for him.

"Hack Bohannon," he told her. "May's expecting me."

She widened the smile and pointed down a hall. "Interrogation room." She glanced at a wall clock. "He has Dennis Toomy with him." She tilted her head. "He must have known you'd be on time. Are you always?"

"You can test me," Bohannon said. "Tomorrow night. At six-thirty. The Briary Bush. Dinner? They serve great salmon steaks there—fresh caught from the creek."

She laughed, a sound pleasant as bells. "And they charge twenty dollars for it. Are you rich, Mr. Bohannon? Can you afford to throw your money away on nameless deputy sheriffs?"

"Your name is T. Hodges," he said. "It's on your badge."

She touched the badge with slim fingers. "I'd forgotten that. Who are you? What do you do?"

"Keep stables up Rodd Canyon. For town people who haven't anyplace to keep a horse. I also rent horses to people who can't afford them but like to ride."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She watched his left hand scratch his ear. "That's a wedding band." Her glossy brown eyes mocked him.

He said stiffly, "My wife's in a mental hospital." Linda had been held hostage on a filthy drug smuggler's boat, half drowned, beaten, and repeatedly raped. Afterward she had crept inside herself—it looked like forever. "I'm not asking you to sleep with me, deputy. Only to have dinner with me."

A telephone with a broad flat display of lucite buttons on her desk began to buzz and wink. She said, "Perhaps some other time," gave him a gentle, regretful smile, pushed one of the buttons, picked up the receiver, and spoke into it.

Bleakly, Bohannon walked to the interrogation room. Fred May was twenty pounds heavier than he used to be, which brought him to about three hundred pounds. He also had less hair. But the tic that tended to make jurors wonder if he was serious when he pleaded with them and kept winking—that seemed gone. He wasn't dressed for a courtroom tonight. He wore a blue T-shirt stenciled *Save the Sea Otter,* and his belly bulged over cutoffs bought when he was thinner. His arms and legs were furry. He sat at a scratched yellow-oak table on a bentwood chair his bulk made appear fragile.

Across from him sat a big-boned blond boy, long hair pulled back in a 1960s ponytail. He wore yellow jail coveralls unzipped to the navel, showing a deep chest, gold hair glinting on it in the sour overhead light. The sleeves of the coverall were short and the boy's arms were thickly muscled, gold hair glinting on them, too. With his big strong hands, high cheekbones, blue eyes under a heavy brow ridge, he looked as Paul Bunyan must have, just out of the egg. What he failed to look was bright.

"What's this all about?" he said to Bohannon.

"Billie Shears wants me to help you." Bohannon pulled out another bentwood chair and sat on it. He looked at Fred May. "How can I do that?"

"If I was going to kill him by fixing the brakes on a car," Toomy said, "I'd fix them on his, not hers."

"Not if you knew she'd be using his car last night," Bohannon said, "to haul things over to the park for the big yard sale. Lieutenant Gerard says she was doing that all day and the better part of the night. His is a big car. Hers is too small for the purpose."

"I didn't know about the sale," Toomy said.

Bohannon looked at May. May shook his head. The white of his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scalp shone greasily in the light. "He says he was in Davis, but I can't scare up a witness."

"I was in my room," Toomy said. "Studying. I'm doing my masters now. I'm going for a doctorate." He looked ready to cry. "I should have gone to the library. Then everybody would have seen me. I go almost every night."

"Is there a phone in your room?" Bohannon said.

"Nobody phoned me," Toomy said. "I wish they had. It's a wall phone, down the hall. The landlady answers it and calls anybody that's wanted."

"You didn't call out?" Bohannon said.

"I told you—I was studying."

"But you keep a stock of quarters," Bohannon said, "so you can call when you need to. Madrone, for example. The Kruger house?"

Toomy's mouth twisted. "I keep a stock of stamps," he said with grim humor. "We wrote letters."

"So I hear," Bohannon said. "But somebody telephoned Mr. Kruger last night. That's how it looks. And lured him up into those canyons above Madrone, where he drove off the road and died because the brakes on his wife's car had been monkeyed with. All the fluid dripped out."

"I don't know anything about cars," Tommy said.

May unwrapped a stick of chewing gum and folded it into his mouth. "That checks out. We had the Davis police ask his friends on campus. Dennis is famous for his ignorance of mechanical matters." He gave the boy a brief, unhappy smile.

"All the letters say," Toomy told Bohannon, "is how great it would be for Melanie and me if Tom had an accident and died. They don't say anything about rigging an accident."

"You use the library all the time," Bohannon said. "What would stop you from looking up in an auto-repair manual where the brake lines are? They're easily accessible. Anyone could poke a hole in one with an icepick."

"I don't have an icepick," Toomy said. "What kind of helper are you supposed to be, anyway?"

"You wanted him dead so you could live off his widow—the money, insurance, property she'd inherit. That's a motive, Dennis. It would help if someone else had one. Didn't Melanie ever mention anybody else who'd want Tom Kruger dead?"

Toomy gave his head a shake. "All she said was Mountain Savings and Loan was his whole life. He'd forgotten about her years ago

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—never took her anyplace, hardly spoke to her. His focus was down to making money." Toomy sulked. "Greed. It's ruining the planet."

"And that's why you killed him?"

"I didn't kill him," Toomy shouted.

"What was the check for, then?"

Toomy flushed. "It was a gift. She said I needed clothes. That's how she is. Beautiful and fine and giving."

"Uh huh. You should have stuck to Billie Shears." Bohannon looked at May. "Has bail been set?"

The fat man nodded. "Fifty thousand each."

Bohannon asked Toomy, "Have you got five thousand bucks for a bail bondsman?" Toomy only stared. "Because if you haven't, you'll stay locked up till your trial."

"That's not true. Melanie's not like that. You don't know her." But Toomy's bravery was all noise. He turned to May and his voice was small. "She wouldn't leave me here."

May chewed his gum. "She walked out an hour ago."

"You're no use to her any more, Dennis," Bohannon rose. "But don't take it too hard." He went to the door. "Billie still loves you." He pulled open the door. A uniformed officer waited outside. Bohannon turned back. "Billie says she knows you didn't do it. How does she know that?"

Toomy said dully to the table top, "Figure of speech."

"I hope not," Bohannon said.

Bohannon remembered this place as a meadow. He recalled a particular afternoon, though it may have been several afternoons overlaid in his memory and probably was, when twenty or more deer had come out of that stand of oaks over there, hesitant, watchful, big ears moving, and stood statue-still in knee-deep spring grass and wildflowers, watching his car pass. It had been sunset time, really. Now it was bright morning, and in the meadow stood three large houses. The building-over was happening fast. Before he died, Rodd Canyon, too, would have filled up with people, houses, kids, dogs, cars. He'd move on when that happened—though God knew where he'd move to. He swung in at a curving driveway between patchy new lawns and flowerbeds and halted behind a white BMW parked at the front door of the house.

The woman surprised him by being small and slim. She's old, Billie Shears said in Bohannon's memory. But she didn't look old. She was as fair as Billie, or fairer, her hair in a fashionable short

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bob. She wore jeans and a plaid shirt and soft leather boots, and carried a glass of orange juice. To his question, "Do deer come down out of those woods any more?" she answered without surprise, "Yes, sometimes, still. It's the raccoons that give trouble, though." Her smile made age lines around a generous mouth. "What bandits they are." She looked him up and down. He wore jeans, too, and a plaid shirt and boots, but all of a tougher sort and not new like hers—far from new, in fact. His hat was mapped by stains of sweat and weather.

She frowned a little, which didn't make her look younger, either. "You own the riding stables, don't you? What brings you here?"

"I'm also a private investigator." He took out a folder and showed her his license. "I'm inquiring into your husband's death." He looked into her eyes. They were greenish grey. "I'm sorry for your loss."

"Thank you." She said it mechanically, dismissively, and turned from the doorway. "Come in. I'm glad you came. Something's wrong here. I was about to phone the sheriff."

The house was New England saltbox, grey and white outside. Inside, it was comfortably formal, the furniture traditional. There was a lot of wallpaper and white paint. The staircase had varnished treads.

He closed the door behind him. "Wrong how?" he asked, and she led him up the stairs. She opened a white door to a rear room the designer probably meant to be slept in but that was outfitted instead with a desk and file cabinets, a computer in glossy beige plastic, a multi-line telephone, shelves with books about banking and finance. He saw what she meant by wrong. Drawers hung open, papers strewed the hardwood floor and the oval braided rugs. She had showed him inside past her and hung back, standing outside in the hall.

"He didn't like me to come in here," she said.

Bohannon looked around at the mess and back to her. "Those letters Dennis Toomy wrote you. Did you see them when they questioned you at the sheriff's station?"

"Oh, yes," she said glumly. "Yes, indeed."

"And they had all of them? There were no others?"

She shook her head. "I still don't know how Tom found them. He wasn't the suspicious type. He trusted me. They were hidden in a small department-store gift box in my closet." Her smile was amazed. "You didn't think I'd hide them here."

"I didn't," Bohannon said, "but someone else might." He pushed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at computer printouts with his boot, frowning. "Have you had break-ins before?"

"Never," she said. "Of course, we only moved out here a few weeks ago. But it's not common in this area, is it?"

"You think it happened last night?" Bohannon crouched, picked up an armload of the folded sheets and squinted at them. "What made you look in here this morning?"

"I came home tottering with exhaustion after Archie arranged my bail. I showered to get the smell of the jail off me, took a sleeping pill, and slept very hard. It was early, but I didn't care. I wanted oblivion. But sometime in the night I woke. Had I heard someone in the house? I didn't know, and I fell asleep again right away. But when I got up this morning, I remembered the noise and I looked through the house. Not thoroughly, really. I half thought I'd dreamed it. But that's how I happened to look in here."

"So it could have happened the night he died, when you were both away," Bohannon said, "or during the day."

She shook her head. "No. I have a daily woman. Inez."

"Right." Bohannon let the printouts whisper onto the desk and studied the room. "He brought work home. So where is his attache case?"

Startled, she came into the room, orange-juice glass still in her hand. "That's a very good question." She walked around, peering into corners, into a closet stacked with storage files and office supplies. She shut the closet door and regarded Bohannon. "Private investigator? Working for whom?"

"Dennis Toomy," he said, "at the request of Billie Shears."

"That brat," she said coldly.

"What was in the attache case?" Bohannon asked.

"Good God, how would I know? Me—a mere woman?"

"What did it look like?" Bohannon said. "Color, make?"

"Mark Cross. Tan cowhide. With his initials in gold. I gave it to him for his fiftieth birthday. It was something he took with him everywhere. I thought"—she sounded for a startling moment as if she might cry, and tears brightened her eyes—"he might be reminded of me now and then."

"Do you think Dennis Toomy arranged for that accident?"

She shrugged fragile shoulders inside the plaid shirt and turned away. "What a fool I was. A college boy. Dear God." She walked out the office door, halted, turned back. "The things loneliness can make a person do. I wish I could change it, go back to that morning, not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feel what I felt, just let him look at the oaks and tell me, and then send him on his way. I'd give everything to change that."

"I know what you mean," Bohannon said, and he did. "But do you think he went ahead and fixed those brakes? Do you think he telephoned your husband here that night while you were out hauling tarnished toasters and lopsided lamps down to Seaside Park for the sale, and told him something that would get him up into those mountains, those canyons, those crooked dark little trails at midnight?"

She opened her eyes wide. "Wait. Maybe the attache case was in the car. He could have taken it with him. Maybe that was what whoever called asked him to bring."

"Did Dennis know anything about your husband's work?"

"All Dennis knows is trees."

"The attache case wasn't in the car," Bohannon said.

"Perhaps after the crash the killer took it."

"Afraid not," Bohannon said. "I was the first person to come upon the car. There were no human tracks down there. I don't think he took the attache case." He came out of the office room and closed the door behind him. "You think Dennis did it. That's why you left him in jail."

"He's emotional," she said. "A child. I shouldn't have wept on his shoulder. He hated Tom for what he'd done to me. But I never meant for him to—" She closed her mouth.

Bohannon grunted and started down the stairs. "It's a beautiful house," he said. "A beautiful setting. A way of life most people only dream about. You forgot all that?"

"Exactly," she said. "I was a fool."

"And Dennis Toomy has to pay?" Bohannon stood on the polished oak floor of the entry hall and glanced into the handsome lifeless rooms on either side, morning sunlight slanting into them. "It wasn't Dennis who rifled those files upstairs."

"I suppose not." She shrugged, passed Bohannon, pulled open the front door. She gave Bohannon a wan smile as he put on his hat and stepped outside. "I don't want to think about it. I'm a selfish, spoiled woman, used to having everything—almost everything—as I want it. I want to forget Dennis Toomy, all about him, as quickly as I can. If I can."

She used the woebegone smile to mock what she knew herself to be—though she didn't really care. She laid a hand for a moment on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bohannon's arm. "He'll be all right. You don't think he did it. You'll find out who did."

"You broke it," Bohannon said, "and I pick up the pieces?"

"Something like that," she agreed.

He thought of Rivera. "You don't believe in hell?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "It's right here on earth."

Meritt Fletcher rocked in a highbacked padded-rawhide chair behind a glossy desk. Executive Director of Mountain Savings and Loan, he was a hefty man in his mid-fifties, white-haired, rosy-cheeked. His blue eyes had a way of twinkling and laughter seemed always ready to shape his mouth. He didn't have Thomas Kruger's taste in clothes, however. His linen jacket was a loud plaid in rust-red and three shades of green. Fletcher said:

"She could have rifled those files herself. Why not? I've known Melanie Kruger for years. Close friends with a man, close friends with his wife, right? But I never liked her. Had no reason for that, so I tried to overcome the feeling." He sighed and waggled white eyebrows. "But now it looks as if my instincts were right. She blamed Tom, said his career left no time for her. It wasn't that way. She was cold, cold as she looks. I'd have divorced her. I've done that twice. Not Tom." Sorrowfully, Fletcher shook his head. "For him, she was the only woman in the world. Poor bastard. What else was there for him but his work?"

Bohannon said, "She could have done it herself, yes. To furnish Archie Fitzmaurice with an argument in her defense—that somebody else wanted Tom Kruger dead."

"It wouldn't have worked for long," Fletcher said.

"That's why I don't think she did it," Bohannon said.

"Rifled Tom's files, you mean," Fletcher said. "She killed him all right. Nobody else had a reason."

"He had a lot of work at home there," Bohannon said. "Stuff he'd brought from here."

Fletcher sighed, lifted big expensively kept hands, and dropped them to the desktop again. "I tried to interest him in golf, tennis, sailing. I have a boat—he was always welcome. 'All work and no play,' I told him, 'will kill you, Tom. You have to learn to relax.' But he didn't listen. You're right. He took mountains of work home. Had a computer set up there, interfaced with our system here."

"Right," Bohannon said. "And what would somebody break in and steal? Why would they?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fletcher lifted beefy shoulders. "Can't imagine. I mean, if this was a high-tech manufacturing business, a research laboratory, yes. But we're a simple savings institution. Nothing of value but our integrity."

Bohannon rose from the leather chair that faced the desk and went to gaze out a window. Across the highway below, the tall lean pines of the hills that hid the ocean swayed in a forenoon wind. The sun was bright, the sky blue. "You know," he said carelessly, "drugs come in on this stretch of coast. On supposed fishing boats? Illegal aliens with cash to pay the fare? Money changes hands. That money has to go someplace, if only to wait to be sent south for laundering."

"Now listen here." An angry flush replaced Fletcher's rosiness. "If you're implying—"

"Relax," Bohannon said. "I didn't mean you knew where the money came from. But suppose some of it is here? Suppose Tom Kruger discovered some customer, maybe more than one, has been making bigger deposits and withdrawals than he could explain?"

"Ah, yes, I see. Sorry." Fletcher's anger seemed to subside, though wariness lurked in his eyes. "Putting it like that, maybe you're right. But there's this college boy. Those letters between him and Melanie."

"I don't think the break-in took place at the Kruger house till after Tom Kruger was found dead and they were arrested. It worries me, Mr. Fletcher. It worries me that Tom Kruger's attache case is missing."

"It worries me," Fletcher said with sudden heaviness, "that Tom is gone. I'm going to miss him terribly. Not just here, where I relied on him, his sharpness, his integrity. We were close as brothers. Family. We had keys to each other's houses, could talk anytime, about anything."

"Who broke into his house? What for?" Bohannon said.

Fletcher's phone pulsed softly on the desk. He lifted it, listened, said, "Right away," hung up the receiver, and rose. "I don't have any idea," he answered Bohannon, "but you can be sure I'll look into it." He touched Bohannon's card that lay on the desk, a horse head printed on it. "And if I find anything the least suspicious, I'll get in touch with you." He let his smile loose now, a little ruefully. "Meantime, I'll ask you to excuse me. The State auditors are here on their semiannual visit." He shook Bohannon's hand, opened his office door, and with a hand between Bohannon's shoulder blades, showed him out, and turned his attention to bespectacled men in poplin suits, who came on carrying attache cases . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sea had done nothing for it, nor had the nets, nor the long fall with thousands of glistening fish into a wallowing boat. It was wet, scuffed, scarred, but the initials TK still gleamed gold in the hard light of Gerard's office. The case gaped empty on his desk. Empty except for one thing. A Smith and Wesson .45 revolver. Bohannon stared.

"Who belongs to that?" he said.

"Kruger's widow, the ice princess, says he never owned a gun," Gerard said. "Not of any kind. He gave money to the anti-handgun movement."

"Circumstances alter cases," Bohannon said. "It looks new. If he bought it recently, maybe it means he felt threatened. Maybe by the people who broke into his house and stole the briefcase—and whatever was in it."

"It is new," Gerard said. The corners of his mouth twitched in suppressed amusement. "I just put it back in the case to show you how the fishermen found it. It's been through the lab. The cylinder was full. There are no fingerprints on it. If they were drug dealers or coyotes, do you think those types would throw away a brand new name-brand gun that had nothing incriminating about it, not a bullet fired?"

"I don't think so." Bohannon picked the gun up. It was cold and damp because the suede lining of the attache case still held water. He turned the heavy thing over in his hands, puzzled, and laid it back in the case. "Why would anyone?"

"A call will come in on the registration soon," Gerard said. "But what was in this case before the gun got there?"

Bohannon wasn't listening. He frowned out the window, where patrol cars sat in the parking lot and big eucalyptus trees rose out of groundlighting into darkness. "Emotion," he said, "revulsion. When I was about ten, I stole a handful of cigarettes and sneaked out to a storage building full of rusty old tools and cobwebs to smoke them. I got through maybe three and, God damn, was I sick." He laughed at the memory. "I looked at the ones I had left and took and threw those suckers as far as I could into a cornpatch. I never wanted to see another cigarette."

Gerard grinned. "Happened to you, too, did it?" His face sobered. "Yeah, I see what you mean. Somebody bought it to kill him with and lost his nerve."

"Somebody with a boat," Bohannon said.

"Not a smuggler. They don't give a damn what they do."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bohannon said grimly, "Tell me about it."

"Sorry," Gerard said. "So—who does that leave?"

"One man," Bohannon said. "Meritt Fletcher."

Gerard's brows went up and he blinked. "Executive Director of Mountain Savings and Loan? Are you serious?"

Bohannon said, "You could ask him. He owns a boat. He wears jackets that belong only one place—where horses run and horses' asses bet. Auditors were due at his bank today. Last night somebody stole papers from the office in Kruger's house. In that attache case. Why hadn't Kruger found out Fletcher was embezzling to cover his losses at the track?"

Gerard looked pale. "You think it was Kruger who did the phoning—said I've got this proof you're creaming accounts and we better talk about it, meet me someplace in the mountains at midnight?" Gerard reached for a telephone, said into it, "Terry, get me the harbor master's office," and set the receiver down again. "If he went out last night to jettison that attache case, maybe he was seen." Gerard closed the attache case, snapped the catches, and sat staring at it. "But he wouldn't dump the papers at sea."

"His house is that big white Gothic fright down on the point, alone there in the pines. It has a lot of chimneys. He probably used a fireplace."

"Probably." The phone rang. Gerard picked it up and spoke to the harbor master's office. And smiled. Yes, Fletcher took his boat out, around 1:00 A.M., and came back in an hour. Gerard hung up, pushed back his swivel chair on squeaky wheels, stood, and picked up the attache case. "You are one smart son-of-a-gun." He went to lift down his jacket from a hook by the office door. "Fletcher is going to love seeing this again."

"Did they see him carry it on board?"

"No. But I just remembered something." Gerard set the case down and shrugged into his jacket. "He's a thick-set fiftyish man with white hair, right?" He carried the case into the hall and Bohannon followed. Down the hall the clack of typewriters echoed, the moan of a siren from outside. Gerard stopped at the reception desk and told T. Hodges where he was going. She gave him a nod and Bohannon a long look he couldn't translate. Gerard led Bohannon outdoors, where a wind had risen, the smell of rain on it. He said, "Same type as Kruger."

"Meaning," Bohannon said, "it could have been Fletcher who left those letters in your mailbox."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Stubbs was right," Gerard said, "it didn't make sense for Kruger to do it. He wouldn't have wanted a scandal."

"And Fletcher, on his way to kill Kruger, left the letters to cover his ass, to throw suspicion on the wife and her lover." Bohannon followed Gerard to the parking lot, bending into the wind. "Just one thing—how did he get hold of those letters?"

"I'll ask him." Gerard stopped beside a patrol car. "She went riding at your place with Toomy. I don't call that keeping the affair a secret, do you?" Gerard tossed the attache case into the patrol car, got in, slammed the door. "She runs with a gaggle of idle rich women, close friends. Maybe she bragged about Toomy. Maybe she even showed off those letters." The worn engine clattered into life. "Women get carried away."

"They aren't the only ones," Bohannon said.

"What?" Gerard began to back the car.

"You're forgetting." Bohannon walked beside the car, wincing, holding the brim of his hat to keep the wind from snatching it. "Kruger wasn't killed with a gun."

"You're forgetting." Gerard halted the car. "Fletcher's gun wasn't fired. He lost his nerve and fixed the brakes instead. That way he wouldn't have to watch his friend die."

"You don't even know the gun is his," Bohannon said. "You're going too fast. Back off. He's a power in these parts. I don't want you tangling with him on a half assed theory of mine. You could lose your job."

"Thanks." Gerard blinked at him soberly. "I appreciate that, Hack, but—" He backed the car fast, turned it sharply, tires squealing on the blacktop. The car rocked to a stop, the gears clanked. "I don't think it's half assed. And I have to see what's in that fireplace." The car shot forward, jounced out of the parking lot, and roared away up the night street, where the tops of trees were tossing in the wind.

Rain had come on that wind, all right, but the storm had blown on past by midnight and in the morning the sky was a new-washed blue. Patrol cars crowded the sheriff's-station parking lot that was still patched with rain damp and clumps of litter from the trees. But there was an empty slot and Bohannon left his old pickup truck in it.

The station house smelled of coffee in paper cups. Officers stood in groups, drinking coffee, munching doughnuts, talking. Some of the older ones knew Bohannon and gave him nods as he went past.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gerard looked at him red-eyed, asked him to come in and shut the door, told him to sit down. He halfheartedly lifted his styrofoam cup and raised his eyebrows over it in a question.

"No, thanks," Bohannon said. "What was in the fireplace?"

"Very fine ash. I don't think the lab can make anything of it, but Fletcher thinks they can." Gerard smiled. "I don't know where he got that idea, but it was enough to make him talk."

"So he is a compulsive gambler."

"You know that. His jacket told you. And you know how that goes, don't you, for a man who handles other people's money every day. You know he heard about those letters from a woman friend. You know he had a key to the Kruger house so he could hunt till he found them and then he could search Kruger's workroom and remove the proof that he, Fletcher, was ripping off Mountain Savings and Loan. And you know he removed the proof in that attache case and burned the papers and diskettes in his fireplace and dumped the case at sea." Gerard snorted. "Half assed theory? You were right on target."

Bohannon shrugged and lit a cigarette. "But?" he said.

Gerard held up a hand. "Wait. Let me finish reciting everything you know. You know he bought the gun. That didn't seem to me to equate too well—how could he have done that so fast? The answer has two parts. A week or more ago Kruger had told Fletcher he'd run across irregularities that made him think someone inside the institution was draining off interest on accounts. At that point, Kruger didn't dream it was Fletcher, but Fletcher knew, and it panicked him. That's when he bought the gun, on the pretext that it was to arm a security guard. But when he got it in his hands, he knew he couldn't use it.

"The second part is that it was Fletcher who phoned Kruger that night, just as you thought in the first place. He told Kruger he'd confirmed his suspicions and asked Kruger to meet him you know where—but only to get Kruger out of the house, so he could sneak in and get Kruger's proof to destroy it."

"A snipe hunt." Bohannon smiled. "As you said."

"That's exactly what it was."

"Not exactly," Bohannon said. "Not if Fletcher tampered with the brakes on that little red car."

"Yeah, well," Gerard said gloomily, "that's where you missed the target and hit the cow."

"He couldn't have fixed the brakes," Bohannon guessed, "because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he was out of town at the time? Left early, didn't get back until very late? How am I doing?"

"You're being too modest." Gerard drank from the white cup, made a disgusted face, said, "Cold." He looked at Bohannon. "Tell me where he was. You know where he was."

Bohannon had to laugh. "Not Santa Anita."

"Give the gentleman a cigar," Gerard said. "And not alone. He picked up friends—one in Ventura, two in Santa Barbara. We've had them checked out. It's true." Gerard looked sourly into the cup and made to rise. "So, we're back at square one."

"I told you it was a half assed theory." Bohannon stood.

"He's still an embezzler," Gerard said. "Around three hundred thousand, he estimates. You did a good thing, Hack. It helped a lot of people."

"It didn't help Dennis Toomy," Bohannon said.

The rain had washed the shaggy, drooping heads of the old pepper trees that sheltered the brick-and-glass filling station by the highway out of town. Above the trees on a tall steel pole the revolving orange ball with its blue-and-white 76 gleamed glossy as new. A bony man in crisp blue workclothes unlocked the office door of the filling station as Bohannon swung the pickup in off the highway where there was little traffic yet. The man had faded red hair and a worried look. He puttered at a steel desk for a minute, then came out and undid the padlock on a wide garage door he swung upward. He went inside and puttered at a workbench there for a moment. Bohannon stopped the pickup and climbed down out of it. The man turned, called, "Help you?" and came at a quick walk.

Bohannon said, "Mrs. Thomas Kruger a customer of yours?"

The man tilted his head on a scrawny neck and looked doubtful about answering. Maybe he thought confidentiality existed between garage mechanics and their clients. Bohannon showed him his license. The man thought about it for a minute and said, "Both of them." He nodded. "Too bad, what happened." His naturally worried look deepened. "You think you know folks. You never know. I sure wouldn't have pegged those two for that kind of trouble. Plenty of money, not a worry in the world." The mention of money reminded him and he headed back to the office. Bohannon followed. "And damn if he doesn't drive off a road and get killed, and they're saying she did it—her and some college boy."

"That's what they're saying," Bohannon agreed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The man crouched, slid back a panel under a counter, opened a safe there, took from it packets of paper money and bags of coins. He closed the safe, rolled the panel shut, and carried the money past Bohannon and out to the slant-top steel boxes on posts beside the gas pumps.

"But maybe it wasn't that way," Bohannon said. The man unlocked the first of the steel boxes and began laying bills into it, then rattling coins into it. "Did Mrs. Kruger leave her car here day before yesterday—for a lube job, oil change, wheel alignment, something like that?"

"She didn't." The man closed down the lid of the first box, locked it, angled off to the second. He had a rickety walk. "He did. Says he was using her car because she needed his big one to haul stuff down to the park for the rummage sale." He clattered open the padlock on the second change box and glanced at Bohannon as he opened it. "Yeah, an oil change. That's what it was." He began laying in the rest of his bills and coins. "Said he'd pick it up at four-thirty—which is what he done." The man paused and looked again at Bohannon, startled this time. "Was that the car he crashed in?"

Bohannon nodded. "Little red sportscar. Do you have a college girl working here, name of Billie Shears?"

"That's right." The man finished with the money, shut down the lid, locked it. "Part-time is all. But she's a good little worker, don't mind getting her hands dirty."

"Did she get them dirty on Mrs. Kruger's car that day?"

"Here she comes now." The man pointed. A new little hatchback curved down the offramp from the highway, windshield flashing in the sun. "You can ask her yourself."

"I'd rather you told me," Bohannon said.

The man tilted his head again, guarded. "What for? She do something wrong?" Bohannon said nothing. The man looked worriedly at the car Billie wheeled to a stop under a pepper tree, dry berries crackling beneath the tires. "Well, yes, she was the one. She wasn't here when Mr. Kruger left the car and she was gone by the time he picked it up, but she was the one that worked on it. It'll be written on the repair bill."

"Good," Bohannon said. "Thanks for your help."

Billie Shears, in a clean blue jumpsuit with the 76 logo stitched to the pocket, flung herself out of the compact and came running. Her hair was still spiky. "Mr. Bohannon," she panted, "have you found out anything to help Dennis?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Morning, Billie," the filling-station owner said.

"Oh." She gave him a quick, distracted smile. "Morning, Mr. Zimmerman." She peered up at Bohannon, anxious, begging. "It's me you're here to see, isn't it?"

"That's right," Bohannon said. "And the answer is yes. Just as you said—Dennis wasn't the one who fixed those brakes."

"Oh, that's wonderful," she cried, and hugged him.

"It was you," he said, and hugged her back.

Allowing for the heat, Stubbs had very early this morning made potato-leek soup and now it was chilled through. They ate it with thick chunks of new-baked bread and a crisp white wine from a vineyard the other side of the mountains. They were alone at the noon kitchen table. Rivera was up at the seminary.

"The green-eyed monster," Stubbs said, "never dies."

Bohannon said, "And she isn't sorry. She'd do it again. She's a good hater for one so young." He gnawed a crusty chunk from his slab of bread, swallowed some wine, followed it with a spoonful of the icy soup. "Cool customer, that Billie—until Dennis was arrested. Then she lost her head."

"So, now he's free. Does that make her happy?"

"Not with me, it doesn't." Bohannon glanced ruefully at his left hand. His old doctor friend, Belle Hesseltine, had cauterized, stitched, and bandaged it. But Billie had bitten to the bone. The hand ached and throbbed. "She hates my guts."

Footsteps sounded on the long porch, a slender shadow fell on the screen door, and there was a light rapping. Bohannon told the shadow to come in and a slight woman entered, the cat with her. In the backlight it took him a moment to make the woman out. T. Hodges, in a crimp-brimmed straw hat, gingham shirt, trim jeans. Crouching to pet the cat, she smiled faintly. "I thought it might be nice to ride a horse today."

Bohannon stood. "Have some lunch first." He pulled out a chair. "Then maybe we can go riding together."

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKET

EQ FEB/86

ELLERY QUEEN — published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is $2.95 per word — payable in advance — ($44.25 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be

ART

MOVIE POSTERS: Vintage and "Current". Hitchcock, Sci-Fi, Mysteries: 1,000's available: ORDER IMMEDIATELY. (818) 980-1130. Catalog $2.00. Artistic Dimensions, 12115 Magnolia Blvd., North Hollywood, CA 91607.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

LOOKING for a publisher? Learn how you can have your book published, promoted, distributed. Send for free booklet. HP-5, Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., New York, NY 10001.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, ME 04609.

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SMN, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

HARDBACK, paperback mysteries, $3 up. Send stamp. Detective-Mystery Booksearch, P.O. Box 15460, Orlando, FL 32858-5460.

WORLD'S largest mystery specialist. $3 for next 4 catalogues. Aardvarks Book Detectives, P.O. Box 15070, Orlando, FL 32858-5070.

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

SEND 25¢ for Large Listing of Mystery and Detective Books. Canford, Drawer 216E, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

WRITERS! "Telling Lies for Fun & Profit", $8. "Writing the Novel," $10. "Writing For Your Life" (new!), $10. "Affirmations for Writers" (tape), $12. Postpaid, guaranteed! LAWRENCE BLOCK, 3750 Estero #110, Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I. M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

MYSTERIES, THRILLERS. Used hardbacks and paperbacks. Write for free list. Time & Again Books, P.O. Box 13, Bedford, MA 01730.

FREE List of used and rare mysteries. Write to: Alibi Books, Inc., 252 College Street, New Haven, CT 06510.

S.P.E.E.D.—Funny, sexy, political novel $8.00 Postpaid: McBain Publications, 70 Otonabee Drive, Kitchener, Canada N2C 1L6. (519) 694-4000. First Edition!

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

$1,000 Weekly Home Business Directory. Free Details. Name and address to: Box 1610-EQ, Darien, Connecticut, 06820-1610.

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60559.

TYPING AT HOME: Details rush name, address with pre-stamped envelope and $2.00. Marvette Powell, P.O. Box 44300, Chicago, IL 60644.

BE YOUR OWN BOSS! 101 ways to make money with little or no investment using skills you already have. Ideas, explanations, tips, more. $4.00. Davis Enterprises, P.O. Box 7007, Portsmouth, VA 23707. 30 day Guarantee.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PLACE CLASSIFIED

EQ FEB/86

included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

"$1,000's WEEKLY!" MAILING LETTERS! FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITY! EXCITING FREE DETAILS! START IMMEDIATELY! WRITE: $UCCESS, #605-DPG, DRESHER, PA 19025.

ACT NOW! Easy non-risk, profitable business! Earn hundreds part-time. FREE DETAILS: Globel, P.O. Box 8214, Trenton, N.J. 08650.

SECOND INCOME Stuffing Envelopes. Senoff Enterprises, M., 1589 Albion, Rexdale, Ontario M9V 1B6. Enclose a self-addressed envelope.

DEALERSHIPS available for STEELE GLAZE automotive products and detailing business. No Fees or percentage. For details, write: Richmond Company, 53 Hummingbird Lane, Muscatine, Iowa 52761.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations...Closeouts...Job Lots...Single Samples. Free Details: Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 730-IO, Holland, MI 49423.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

UNIVERSITY DEGREES! Economical home study for Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate. Prestigious faculty counsels for independent study and life experience credits. Free information—Richard Crews, M.D. (Harvard), President, Columbia Pacific University, 1415 Third St., Dept. 2M12, San Rafael, CA 94901; Toll Free: 800/227-1617, Ext. 480; California: 800/772-3545, Ext. 480.

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, N.C. 28560.

UNIVERSITY DEGREES BY MAIL. Bachelors, Masters, Ph.D's . . . without attending classes! Inexpensive, fast. Free revealing details. Counseling, Box 389-EQ-2, Tustin, California 92680.

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

OVERSEAS U.S. JOBS AVAILABLE. Unlimited Opportunities. Write for application. Employers, Box 3239-MY, Gulf Shores, AL 36542 or call 205-968-2500.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send $19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305.

GOVERNMENT SURPLUS

"GOVERNMENT SURPLUS" JEEPS $30.00! 5,000,000 Items! Complete Information Your Area. 1986 OFFICIAL DIRECTORY. $3.00 (Guaranteed). SURPLUS, (B3), 4620 Wisconsin Northwest, Washington, D.C. 20016.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Catalog. Hypnotism, Hypnotic cassettes, sleep learning. Become the person you truly want to be. DLMH, Box 487, Anaheim, CA 92805.

INVENTIONS WANTED

EARN Royalties from your inventions or new product ideas. Nuprodux International, 1377 K St. NW, Suite 203, Washington, D.C. 20005.

LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW $25,000 "OVERNIGHT". Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-SN, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

VISA® Obtained Easily! Been Turned Down? Bankrupt? No Credit? No Problem! Write Immediately for Details! Credit-DP286, Box 2289, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

SIGNATURE Cash Loans! Application Rushed! Plus the Most Exciting Financial Techniques to get you Cash! MBG-DP286, Box 2298, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

EQ FEB/86

MAILING LISTS

HIGH QUALITY MAILING LISTS. ALL CATEGORIES. ZIP CODE ORDER. GUARANTEED DELIVERABLE. For Fast Details: Joseph Langer, Breakwater Road, Mattituck, New York 11952-0247.

COMPUTERIZED—opportunity seekers. Adhesive labels. Guaranteed deliverable. 500/$25; 1000/$40; 5000/$150. Dealer's Co-Operative, 4158-I Calhoun, Gary, IN 46408. (219) 838-7099. Visa/Mastercard.

MEMORY IMPROVEMENT

INSTANT MEMORY...NEW WAY TO REMEMBER. No memorization. Release your PHOTOGRAPHIC memory. Stop forgetting! FREE information. Institute of Advanced Thinking, 845DP ViaLapaz, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272.

MISCELLANEOUS

OLD-TIME RADIO—The best shows on reels or cassettes. Best quality, fastest service. Catalog $1.00: P.O. Box 3509, Lakeland, FL 33802.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

"1,000'S WEEKLY"! $ECURING/$TUFFING ENVELOPES! $TART IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: ASSOCIATES, #210-DPG, MAPLE GLEN, PA 19002.

EASY Business, earn $1,000's Weekly! Free details! Send Stamped Addressed Envelope: Todco, Dept. 3, 4219 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, CA 91505.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

EARN $1,000 weekly stuffing envelopes at home. Free supplies. Start immediately. Send stamped, addressed envelope, name and address: Gioia Enterprises, P.O. Box 536, St. Albans, N.Y. 11412-0536.

$10/$360 WEEKLY/Up, Mailing Circulars! No Quotas. Sincerely interested. Rush stamped envelope; National Division, Box 20567-EN2, San Diego, CA 92120.

"HUNDRED$ WEEKLY!" GUARANTEED PROCESSING $STAMPED ENVELOPES! $START IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: MJG-DPG, AMBLER, PA 19002.

CAN YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for $500.00 weekly? Send six 22¢ stamps. Blume, Box 460159, Garland, Texas 75046-0159.

HUNDRED$ Weekly! Large Company needs homeworkers. Send two self-addressed, stamped envelopes. Bloomington, Box 5938, Richardson, Texas 75083.

NEED $750 BY NEXT WEEKEND? FREE Brochure will tell you how. Guaranteed! New Life Publishers, Dept. N, 146-D, 323 Franklin Building South, Chicago, Illinois 60606-0795.

OF INTEREST TO ALL

VIDEO Mystery Movie Classics, free price list. Beta and VHS. House of Stewart, 341 Vanderbilt Ave., Staten Island, New York 10304.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people! 18-80, Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

CONTACT Magazine for friendship, marriage. Members worldwide. Sample issue $5. Singles World, Dept. DA, GPO Box 208, Adelaide, 5001. Australia.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

PERSONAL—Cont'd

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS, worldwide, want correspondence, friendship, marriage. Details, photos free! Rothe, Box 270/D, Berlin 61, W. Germany.

ATTRACTIVE, DEVOTED Oriental ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Dignified presentations by American-Asian couple. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

UNIVERSITY DEGREES! Economical home study for Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate. Prestigious faculty counsels for independent study and life experience credits. Free information—Richard Crews, M.D. (Harvard), President, Columbia Pacific University, 1415 Third St., Dept. 2M12, San Rafael, CA 94901; Toll Free: 800/227-1617, Ext. 480; California: 800/772-3545, Ext. 480.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

STAMP COLLECTING

30 WILD ANIMALS only 25¢ to introduce our Foreign Approvals. Weblor, 140A Elm, No. Reading, MA 01864.

50 CANADA, Japan or Worldwide only .25. Your choice with attractive approvals. Jaydee, 3995 Sandy Hill, Buford, GA 30518.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

TRAVEL

THREE days and two nights of mystery that you don't just read about—you live! For more information and reservations contact the Mid Pines Resort, Southern Pines, North Carolina 28387 (919) 692-2114.

UNUSUAL BOOKS

THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY: Many unique books & official manuals on RESTRICTED subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & MUCH MORE. Free brochures, MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

or

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR FICTION COMBINATIONS:
Mystery, Sci-Fi, or Special

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING
ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

20 WORD MINIMUM
Only $59.00 for 20 Words or Less
$2.95 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $2.95 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ .....
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85

(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example. One 20 word ad $59.00 x 3 months = $177.00 x .85 = $150.45)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$59.00**	(2) **$59.00**	(3) **$59.00**	(4) **$59.00**	(5) **$59.00**
(6) **$59.00**	(7) **$59.00**	(8) **$59.00**	(9) **$59.00**	(10) **$59.00**
(11) **$59.00**	(12) **$59.00**	(13) **$59.00**	(14) **$59.00**	(15) **$59.00**
(16) **$59.00**	(17) **$59.00**	(18) **$59.00**	(19) **$59.00**	(20) **$59.00**
(21) **$61.95**	(22) **$64.90**	(23) **$67.85**	(24) **$70.80**	(25) **$73.75**
(26) **$76.70**	(27) **$79.65**	(28) **$82.60**	(29) **$85.55**	(30) **$88.50**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS: Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each.: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A, 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

NEXT ISSUE (45th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE)

11 stories—10 *NEW*

CELIA FREMLIN (about the sensory deprivation tank)

CLARK HOWARD (about high noon at Mach seven)

GEORGE BAXT (about the time of Nick)

WILLIAM BANKIER (2 stories)

ISAAC ASIMOV (about Griswold)

N. SCOTT WARNER ("first story" #634)

ROBERT TWOHY (about Jinja the Cat)

THOMAS LARRY ADCOCK (about a New York City cop)

SIMON BRETT (about unwilling sleep)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Ben Snow)

plus the results of the title contest in the November issue

ELEANOR SULLIVAN ..... *Editor*
CINDY GOLDMAN ..... *Editorial Assistant*
RALPH RUBINO ..... *Corporate Art Director*
GERARD HAWKINS ..... *Associate Art Director*
MARIANNE WELDON ..... *Associate Designer*
CARL BARTEE ..... *Director of Manufacturing*
CAROLE DIXON ..... *Production Manager*
VALERIE BARTLETT ..... *Production Assistant*
LOUISE MUGAR ..... *Circulation Director, Retail Marketing*
PRISCILLA GARSTON ..... *Circulation Director, Subscriptions*
JAY BRESNEHAN *Circulation Planning Director*
CYNTHIA MANSON *Subsidiary Rights Director*
FLORENCE EICHIN ..... *Permissions & Contracts Manager*
IRENE BOZOKI ..... *Classified Advertising Manager*
JAMIE FILLON ..... *Advertising Manager*

Advertising Sales Offices

NEW YORK	CHICAGO	LOS ANGELES
212-557-9100	312-346-0712	213-785-3114

JOEL DAVIS
President & Publisher

LEONARD F. PINTO
Vice President & General Manager

FRED EDINGER
Vice President Finance

PAULA COLLINS
Vice President Circulation

WILLIAM F. BATTISTA
Associate Publisher

ELLERY QUEEN
Editor-in-Chief (1941–1982)

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Vol. 87, No. 2, Whole No. 514, February, 1986. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.95 a copy. Annual subscription $19.50 in U.S.A. and possessions; $23.00 elsewhere, payable in advance and in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305. **Call (614) 383-3141 with questions regarding your subscription.** Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third-class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario.

© 1986 Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen.

Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. ISSN: 0013-6328.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GET 12 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES FOR $1.

GET $155.40 WORTH OF PENTECOST, KEATING, PETERS AND 9 OTHER GREAT WRITERS FOR $1.

As a new member of The Detective Book Club, you'll make your first big killing on our introductory offer: 12 of the best recently-published mysteries for $1.

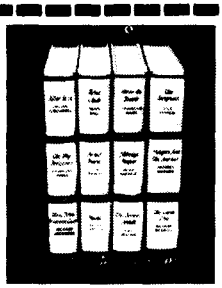
You'll savor baffling murder cases, international intrigue, innocent people caught in a web of evil, terror touched by the supernatural. All served up with the intricate plotting, bizarre twists and gripping action that are the hallmarks of the great modern masters.

Bought in a bookstore, they'd cost $155.40. But as a new member of The Detective Book Club, you get all 12 tales shown for only $1...in four handsome, hardbound, triple-volumes.

As a member, you'll get the Club's free monthly Preview, which describes in advance each month's selections. They're chosen by the Club's editors, who select the best from more than 400 mysteries published each year. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it, within 21 days; there's no minimum number of books you must buy. And you may cancel your membership at any time.

When you accept a club selection, you get three complete, full-length detective novels in one hardcover triple-volume like the ones shown on this page for only $8.95. That's $2.98 per mystery-at least $6 (and sometimes $9 or $10) less than just one costs in the publishers' original editions.

Recent selections have included new thrillers by top names like those featured here, plus Brian Garfield , Dick Francis and many others. Start enjoying the benefits of membership in The Detective Book Club. Send no money now. You'll be billed later for your 12 mysteries. Send the coupon today to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576.



Please enroll me as a member and send me at once my 4 triple-volumes shown here, containing 12 mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for one week, then will either accept all four volumes for the special new member price of only $1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the Club's monthly Preview, which describes my next selection. I will always have at least ten days to reject any selection by returning the form provided. I may return any book sent for full credit within 21 days. For each monthly triple-volume I keep, I will send you only $8.95 plus shipping. I understand I may cancel my membership at any time.

6-KP

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, ROSLYN, N.Y. 11576. D21M9S

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

PUBLISHED BY
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.
ESTABLISHED 1923

Note: Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only; offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DETECTIVERSE

THE BLACK WIDOW

by AVONNE McLAUGHLIN

Widow Black, of generous estate,
Was fastidious beyond debate,
So it's no surprise
She averted her eyes
When neatly dispatching her mate.

© *1985 by Avonne McLaughlin.*

"Q"

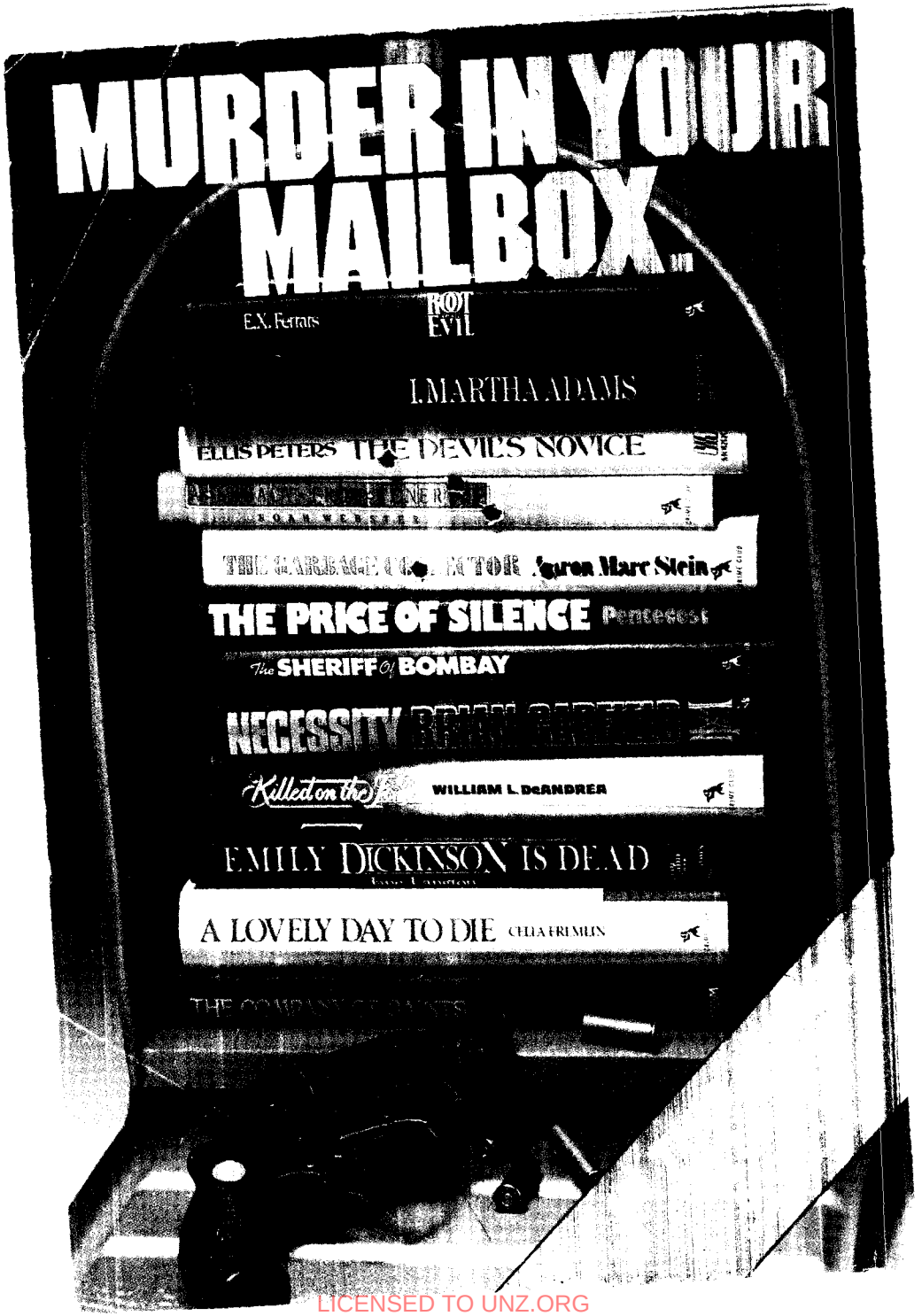
ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

Here lies the body of Jonas Yawkey,
A skillful but dishonest jockey,
Who made his living by pulling horses
At some of the most prestigious courses.
With Jonas up, if the fix was in,
Even a favorite couldn't win.
Though he tried to outrun the speeding pack,
Jonas would hold him strongly back;
Some twenty-to-one shot would win the race
To the favorite's agonized disgrace,
While, for his cheating, his jockey, Jonas,
Received from bookies a princely bonus.
Then came the race where a hard-mouthed bay
Was the odds-on favorite of the day,
And despite his two-faced jockey's thews,
The bay horse simply refused to lose,
And, battling Jonas, he ran out wide,
Breaking his distance-eating stride
And, also ending his jockey's bonus,
He tripped and fell and rolled on Jonas.

© *1985 by James Holding.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED